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THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.

NUMBER 13

The Rainbow Affair

THRUSH's alliance with an international criminal mastermind must be prevented—but can Illya and Napoleon find Johnnie Rainbow in time? A surprising new U.N.C.L.E. novel by DAVID MC DANIEL.

THE RAINBOW AFFAIR

“Down went McGinty to the bottom of the sea,
Dressed in ’is best suit of clothes…”

THE BASS CLEARED HIS THROAT resoundingly and waved an empty mug, while the first baritone called for a refill on his mild ‘n’ bitter. Over the babble of conversation the occasional *thonk* of a dart into a board could be heard, and the blue haze of the atmosphere made the private booths across from the bar seem as distant as mountains. The floor was littered with sawdust and dropped aitches.

Heavy yellow fog pressed close against the leaded windows, as if staring jealously in at this island of roistering humanity that had shut out its noxious chill. Wisps of it swirled eagerly in as the oaken door swung open; they writhed about the thin legs and tweed-covered arms of the new arrival and slowly, reluctantly, dissipated in the cozy warmth which rose to greet them.

There was an almost imperceptible pause in the conversation, and a slightly lowered tone of voice as stubble-chinned faces turned from lifted mugs of frothing brown brew to flick an unobtrusive glance at the newcomer. His bowler hat, neatly brushed and impeccably blocked, was alone among the crowd of curly bare heads and flat caps; his gray suit was quite obviously from a very different section of the City indeed. His tightly rolled umbrella and thin briefcase gave the impression of a junior clerk who had somehow strayed onto an east bound tram at the end of the day’s work instead of the westering one that would have taken him home.

Only his face gave the lie to the rest of his appearance. If he had ever been a junior clerk, it had been years ago. His eyes were mild, but utterly cold; his lips were relaxed, but razor-thin. His entire face was studiedly expressionless, and gave the feeling that it would remain so watching a nude woman, a Pacific sunset, a train wreck or a dying child.

He stepped lightly, almost mincingly, towards the bar, and the barmaid came to him. He leaned forward and murmured something

the nearest listeners could not hear. The barmaid shook her head, and looked at him suspiciously.

“Yer got the wrong place, mate. I think yer got the wrong name, too.”

The man in the gray suit shook his head. “Both the name and the place are correct.” His speech was as carefully perfect as his clothing. He glanced down, and a slim finger darted towards a puddle on the polished wood surface of the bar. He drew four parallel arcs - quarters of concentric circles - and looked at her again. “I want to see Harry.”

“Just ‘oo d’yer think y’are, anyway?” she snapped, somewhat shaken, as she swiped a rag over the spilled beer, adding in a lower tone, “An’ why should ‘Arry want t’ see *yer*?”

The stranger reached inside his overcoat and pulled out a flat case. It flicked open with his hand shielding it; the nearest watcher got only a glimpse of something black. This sharp-eyed gentleman, later questioned by curious contemporaries, claimed complete ignorance.

“‘Twarn’t a buzzer,” he said, “‘n’ ‘twarn’t a pitcher. Just some kinda card.” His curious contemporaries shook their collective heads, and had more ale.

The barmaid, however, did not shake her head. She looked down, then up, and her face grew tight.

“Not ‘ere,” she said, eyes darting left and right. “Narks an’ busies, ‘alf of ‘em.” Her exaggeration was forgivable; she added immediately, in her lowest tone, “Through the private bar, an’ down the ‘all. Second on the right, marked *Private*. Wait there.”

And she was off with a flourish of skirts and a cluster of mugs to fill.

The man in the gray suit replaced the flat case and followed the muttered directions as if it were a ritual. The door of the private bar swung shut behind him, damping out the lessened chatter of the common room, and a beaded portier in atrocious taste tinkled as he pushed through it into a narrow, dimly lit hail.

The door marked *Private* was not locked. Inside, a sagging sofa, a ring-stained coffee table and a scarred desk, along with a few ill-assorted chairs, made up the total furnishing. Quite uncharacteristically, the walls were of fine dark oak paneling halfway to the ceiling. The visitor noted this, and his eyes narrowed slightly. He took a chair near the door, facing the unoccupied desk. He sat stiffly forward on the edge of his chair, his thin briefcase balanced upright on his knees, his umbrella hooked over his left arm. He did not move for some three minutes.

Neither did he move when a section of the paneling slid aside near the desk and a short, dark, stocky man stepped out. He was dressed in a style that could only be called “natty,” but his face was marked with a vicious scar which ran from the bottom of one eye straight down the cheek past the corner of the mouth to his chin. He paused in the secret doorway a few seconds, studying his visitor, then grinned wolfishly.

“‘Ow d’y’like it?” he asked proudly. “One o’ the advantages y’don’t find in modern office buildings.” He pulled it closed behind him, and the edge was barely visible. “We took this place over from an ol’ Chink used to run a pipe joint in the basement. Not many like it any more.” He slouched into the padded chair behind the desk. “War took out a lot of ‘em in this part o’ town.”

He paused and regarded his visitor intently for a few seconds, then said, “Well, if y’ don’t like small talk, what else can we do for ya?”

“Are you Dingo Harry?” The voice was cool and flat.

“They call me that sometimes; sometimes they call me worse.” He grinned wolfishly and winked. “Expect y’ know about that, too.”

The man nodded. “You’re the Head Surgeon in some quarters. But we are not interested in you. We are interested in a friend of yours - a man whom you occasionally represent. You know of whom I speak.”

Harry registered ingenuous surprise and puzzlement. “I’ve done a spot of agenting from time to time, but nothing lately. I ‘andled a nice line o’ dancers for European, African and South American spots…”

“But the white slave racket isn’t as profitable as it used to be. Surely your time is too valuable to allow its waste in such games. You know whom I represent; you know whom I wish to contact. I gave his name to your barmaid; if she did not relay it to you along with a description of my identification, she should be discharged.”

“Now don’t get your feathers ruffled. Let’s just say I like to be careful. My friend is a very solitary chap; likes ‘is privacy. ‘Ates to ‘ave salesmen beatin’ at ‘is door. ‘E likes me to sort of ‘andle ‘is business in town, as it were. An’ I ‘ave ‘is complete confidence. Anything y’ want t’ say to ‘im, y’ can say to me.”

“Under the circumstances that would not be practical. I have been directed to deal only with him. Surely you know of the organization behind me; you know that we do not involve ourselves lightly with petty criminals…”

That touched a nerve. Harry’s face hardened and be leaned forward over the desk, palms flat to either side. His voice was soft. “You seem to ‘ave a slightly bent view of things, mate. I’ve ‘eard some about you, and nothin’ I’ve ‘eard ‘as mentioned anything near as big as our jobs. What ‘ave you done in the last four years that people are still talkin’ about? If that’s petty, I’d like to know what you consider big!”

“Your friend’s jobs are indeed far from petty. But it was his job, not yours.”

Harry subsided slowly, leaning back once more in his chair. He did not answer.

“The only reason I am here,” the visitor continued, “is that your friend has placed you quite firmly between himself and the rest of the world. It is to him and him alone that I would speak.”

“Right, mate,” said Harry. “‘E placed me ‘ere for ‘is own reasons, and they’re good enough for me. If ‘e didn’t want me blockin’ people tryin’ t’ get to ‘im, I wouldn’t be ‘ere. But since ‘e did, I’m doin’ my part.”

The man in the gray suit shook his head slightly. “Your part does not include preventing anyone from contacting him. Surely there are provisions for establishing communications.”

Harry smiled again, baring slightly yellowed fangs. “Of course there is, mate. You just leave me your card, an’ I’ll see to it that ‘e’s informed of your interest in ‘is welfare. An’ leave a phone number with it. If ‘es interested, ‘e’ll give you a jingle.”

The stranger looked closely at Harry for a moment, and apparently decided he could be pushed no further. He produced a business card and an elegantly slim silver pen, and scribbled something on the card before standing up and placing it on the desk.

Harry picked it up and glanced at it. It was black, and bore the strange emblem of a stylized bird in a fighting pose, claw lifted and hooked beak open. On the back was a telephone number. He nodded and tucked it in his coat pocket. “By the way,” he said. “Don’t call us - we’ll call you.”

But his visitor was gone, and the door stood slightly open. Harry did not grin as he got up to close it.

Out in the public bar only a few people noticed the man in the gray suit. The chorus was continuing to tune up and lubricate their pipes as he passed by; they looked up as the cold wet fog swirled forward to welcome him back to its embrace, then lifted their mugs and voices as the door thudded closed behind him.

“And ‘e must be very wet, for ‘e ‘asn’t come up yet - Dressed in ‘is best suit of clothes!”

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Section I

“God Loves An Idle Rainbow”

Chapter 1

How Mister Waverly Spoke Severely of Rainbows, and Illya Kuryakin Remained Unimpressed

THE ANCIENT PROJECTOR clattered and buzzed in the darkened room, sending an almost solid beam of flickering light through the curls of smoke to splatter brilliantly on the far wall. There unsteady shapes of gray and white came and went - a city street, far away in both time and space from its intent watchers. A blocky streetcar started and stopped, passing an improbable line of laden camels. A fezzed water-seller smiled into the camera and held out a cup.

An ornate title flashed on the screen: "*IN EXOTIC CAIRO, WHERE EAST MEETS WEST*." In a few seconds it was replaced by another shot of an open plaza, where white-robed Arabs strolled among business-suited Europeans, and squarish automobiles moved jerkily about the back ground.

"Here he comes," said a voice out of the darkness near the projector. "Screen left, fairly close."

A few seconds later a slender young man with a neatly pointed beard came into view. He was impeccably attired in a frock coat and striped trousers, with spatter-dashes protecting his shoes and a top hat at a precise angle on his head. He sported a cane, and walked with a noticeable limp.

"That's him," said the voice. "Just a second…"

The young man approached the camera diagonally, utterly unaware of its scrutiny. He was no more than ten feet away when he paused suddenly and looked directly at it. For a moment he held his position, and his image froze in that fraction of time. The grain of the old film seemed to solidify from its Brownian dance, and the lean handsome face it had captured stared aggressively at them, as if poised for a scathing insult.

“There he is,” said the voice. “Cairo, in 1923. A travelogue photographer by the name of Devlin was shooting a film on the mysterious Middle East. He probably never had the least idea of the mystery he actually caught a corner of.”

Napoleon Solo looked at the face projected upon the wall and nodded. “You’re positive of the identification?”

“Reasonably, considering Devlin was unconcerned with getting signed releases, and considering the fact that this was shot almost forty-five years ago. You’ve seen him - do *you* think that’s Baldwin?”

Solo turned to the shadowy figure in the next seat to his. “What do you think, Illya? Is that him?”

The Russian’s soft voice answered hesitantly. “Well, he had all his hair then. The film is too grainy to get any good Bertillion comparisons. But the basic shape of his face is the same, and from what I could see of his right ear it’s the proper type. And of course there’s the limp… I would say, under the circumstances - since Section Four seems fairly certain - that probably is Ward Baldwin.”

There was a moment’s silence, then the projectionist asked, “Shall I go on?”

“I think so,” said Napoleon.

The projector’s whirr came up to speed and the clattering racket began as the figure came to life again and hastily averted his face as he walked off the right side of the frame. The bustling plaza was replaced by another title introducing the Pyramids, and the travelogue continued.

At last a full profile of the enigmatic face of the Sphinx looking out over the sands of the ancient desert faded, and “THE END” wrote itself across the screen. The light died, and the noise of the projector ground to a stop as the fluorescents in the room flickered and came on.

Napoleon blinked at the sudden illumination, and turned to his partner, who was looking at him with a slightly puzzled expression.

“Really, Napoleon, I am impressed with our Intelligence section. But why the interest in what Ward Baldwin looked like in 1923?”

Solo shrugged uncertainly. “Call it a hunch. We’re going to be running into that limping devil again some time - I’m sure of it. And I want to know everything about him. That’s why I’ve had this order in with Section Four for the last year and a half - right, John?”

The projectionist, a graying bespectacled man, nodded and grinned. “Anything at all connected with Ward Baldwin, head of Thrush Satrap in San Francisco, gets relayed to you. And frankly, there hasn’t been much. Finding this piece of film was a fluke.”

“That’s okay - flukes pay off. As we used to say, Luck Counts.”

“You should know that better than anyone, Napoleon,” said Illya good naturedly.

Solo smiled, his long face creasing into its most innocently boyish expression. “It’s my greatest talent,” he said modestly. “Call it luck, talent, or magic - as long as I can depend on it, I’m bulletproof.” His face grew more serious. “And I’ve always been able to depend on it, except during that DAGGER affair a couple years ago. And Baldwin was all over that.”

Illya permitted himself a low, Slavic chuckle. “You think he’s a jinx? And if you can figure him out enough, he won’t be able to bother you?”

Napoleon frowned thoughtfully. “Maybe so. Maybe so. But I know we’re going to run into him again. And there just might be something, somewhere, we can use as a lever against him.”

A bell chimed softly, and Napoleon picked up a telephone handset beside his chair. “Solo here… Okay. Be right up.” He replaced the intercom and rose. “Mister Kuryakin, we’re needed. Upstairs, and it sounds like an assignment.”

The projectionist looked up from his rewinding reels. “Will you want a blowup of that frame?”

“No, I don’t think so. Thanks anyway. Just don’t lose it - we may need it someday.” He paused. “I can’t imagine for what, but we may.”

They stepped out into the corridor side by side and strode towards an elevator. “So Baldwin was in Cairo in 1923,” Napoleon said under his breath. “I wonder what he was doing there.”

“Why don’t you ask him?” said Illya. “You’ve got his address and telephone in the files.”

Napoleon paused and looked at him. “Do you really think he’d tell me if I asked him?”

“He might. You could wait until we encounter him professionally, but on the other hand he might not be on speaking terms with us then.”

Solo nodded. “What a shame he’s on the wrong side.” Illya smiled slightly. “You may remember he said the same about us. I suppose it’s all how you look at it.”

The metal doors hissed closed behind them, and a few seconds later opened again on another floor. They proceeded down the grim gray corridors, passing through banks of the most sophisticated security devices known to electronic science, to an otherwise undistinguished door. It slid open, revealing a large, high-ceilinged room with a huge world map on one wall, a complex communications console on another, tall narrow windows on a third, and a large round table dominating the floor. Across the table from them, Alexander Waverly looked up as they stepped into the room and the door slid closed behind them.

“Mr. Solo - Mr. Kuryakin - please be seated.” He placed two manila folders bearing the skeleton-globe insignia of U.N.C.L.E. on the edge of the table and gave it a turn. The two agents picked up the folders as they came by and opened them.

As they did so their chief spoke again. “A week ago yesterday the firm of N. M. Rothschild and Sons, merchant bankers, was robbed of a quantity of gold bars worth just over two million dollars. The particulars on this affair are the first item in the folder before you. As you will observe, the loot consisted of more than a ton and a half of pure gold in one hundred and forty-four bars. Not the sort of prize one can conveniently carry off in a Gladstone bag, conceal in a rental locker, or bury in the back yard.”

Illya leafed through the stapled sheets of paper, then looked up. “Impressive,” he said. “But does it fall within our province?”

“Thrush has been developing a taste for large quantities of pure gold lately,” Napoleon suggested. “It has a certain advantage in international trade, as well as being practically impossible to trace.”

“While the possibility still exists,” Waverly said, “Thrush has been tentatively absolved of this particular job. The *modus operandi* bears striking similarity to several robberies in the last few years, not all of which have been awarded the publicity attendant upon this one. An absolute minimum of violence; a perfectly planned, timed and coordinated operation on a scale which would daunt most thieves; and loot which would present an insoluble difficulty of disposal to any but the best organized gang with secure international connections.”

“The Great Train Robbery,” said Napoleon, his voice supplying the capital letters deserved by the largest successful haul in modem history.

Waverly nodded. “And a few others. The Royal Mail job certainly is the best-known, and it is, as far as we can tell, only the second of the robberies which are of interest in this case. You will find details on that operation as the second item in your folders.”

He paused while both agents examined the second sheaf of pages. Again Illya spoke first. “Without intending to appear facetious, under the circumstances, sir, isn’t this properly the concern of Scotland Yard, or at best, of Interpol?”

“Until now,” said Waverly, “it has been. Both organizations, admirable as they are, have been making only slight headway for almost four years.”

“Sir,” said Napoleon, “what is special about this gold heist that deserves our attention?”

“A moment please, Mr. Solo. You will note there is a third item in your folder. Allow me to give you the back ground on it. Evidence has been accumulating in certain areas that there is, as suspected, a single mind be hind these operations. A cashiered ex-British army officer, known only by the code name of Johnnie Rainbow.”

“Johnnie Rainbow?” said Illya, studying the third sheaf of pages. “An unlikely name.”

“An unlikely individual,” said Waverly. “Probably one of the finest criminal minds of the last fifty years.”

“But hardly our concern,” said Illya. “I realize I am in no position to make suggestions on matters of policy to the head of Section One, but it seems to me that if we turned out after every bank robber in the world we’d never have time to save civilization. Local crime should be left to local authorities, regardless of their effectiveness.”

Napoleon started to object. “But this isn’t just any bank robber, Illya. He’s in a class by himself, you might say.”

“He’s just a bigger and better bank robber, in other words.” Illya frowned slightly. “You’re part of Policy Section, Napoleon. If your section thinks we should chase after a bank robber, I’ll go. But it’s scarcely what I signed on for.”

“It’s scarcely what you will be doing, Mr. Kuryakin,” said Waverly with just a hint of asperity creeping into his voice. “For one thing, the loot from the Royal Mail is unrecoverable - our sources indicate that the bulk of it not only left England within a year after the robbery, but has now returned to England through untraceable and unimpeachable legal channels. To save you the trouble of looking it up on page sixteen of the report before you, it was shipped out of the country bit by bit in the diplomatic pouches of a certain middle-Eastern nation which is badly in need of hard currency, in return for their government bonds which have since been disposed of on the open market, and the profits therefrom parceled out to the men who actually pulled the robbery, or in some cases spent to free them from prison and remove them to a place of safety. Scotland Yard has not been completely ineffectual - almost half of the train jobbers have been detained, at least temporarily. Only last fall Buster Edwards was arrested in connection with the job; I believe he is still in custody, but for how long no one-can tell.

“The point I want to make is this: the men who did he physical work of the robbery could scarcely have disposed of the loot themselves. They instead trusted it to Johnnie Rainbow. Any man capable of commanding this degree of loyalty is well worth a second look. Secondly, and finally, our sources in England indicate that

Rainbow's recent and continual successes have attracted the attention of another group, one in which we are vitally interested."

Napoleon looked up from his study of the Rainbow dossier. "Since so much seems to be known about Johnnie, what is preventing the Yard from giving him a complete going over?"

Waverly smiled wryly. "An unfortunate skepticism. The Criminal Investigation Division of Scotland Yard has yet to be convinced of the actual existence of Johnnie Rainbow. The information on him was developed by a retired Superintendent of Detectives through his own personal sources, and since the data did not come through officially recognized channels the Yard has felt justified in discounting it, at least so far."

Illya cleared his throat and spoke thoughtfully. "Rainbow is a brilliant criminal, able to command great loyalty and presumably respect from his workers. He probably has quite a personal fortune stowed away by this time. But his work is confined to England, although he has wide international contacts. Would it perhaps be reasonable to suppose that he has attracted the attention of Thrush?"

"Exactly," said Waverly. "Thrush has begun to woo Mr. Rainbow with offers we can only begin to guess. If you will check page three of the dossier on the recent gold robbery, you will find that the guards were incapacitated with guns which squirted a blinding spray. There is an excellent chance that these guns were supplied to the Rainbow gang by Thrush.

"Involving as they do the utilization of international exchange, the crimes already have international implications. The criminal himself has a great deal more. Were Thrush to succeed in winning him to their camp, we could foresee the police of the world baffled, the treasury of Thrush enriched many times over, and robberies worthy of the imagination of a pulp novelist being implemented daily."

"What exactly is our assignment, then? To help the Yard find Rainbow, to find him ourselves, to lop off whatever arm of Thrush is beckoning him, or a combination?"

"All three, if possible. The last has priority; as has been pointed out, the local authorities generally prefer to retain responsibility in

their own area. If you can lead them to Rainbow and then step out of the scene as they arrest him, well and good."

He tossed the familiar slim envelopes on the table and spun them to their recipients. "Here are your tickets from Kennedy International to London. On arrival you will cheek in with New Scotland Yard - and remember, they've moved to a new address - but don't expect too much cooperation. Accept whatever they're willing to offer, and then continue on your own. We have little to go on here, frankly; you will doubtless be improvising as you go." He swiveled his chair back towards his desk and reached for the humidor.

Napoleon and Illya stood, the Russian still with a trace of a scowl. Waverly, without turning around, spoke again. "If you have any further comments, Mr. Kuryakin, please don't hesitate to make them."

"Well," said Illya reluctantly, "I still can't feel too impressed by a mere bank robber."

Waverly tamped his pipe calmly. "Understandable, Mr. Kuryakin. I suggest you study his dossier tonight. You may have a different feeling towards him when you have done so." He struck a match and listened as the steel door sighed closed behind his two agents.

Chapter 2

How Napoleon Commented on the Weather, and the C.I.D. Took a Firm Stand on the Subject of Rainbows

THE PLANE CAME down out of the fog, tiny streaks of water flicking across the windows, with gray wisps of limbo wrapping themselves around the sleek steel body. Its wheels touched the runway, screeched and smoked as the thunder of the jets rose to a scream of reversed thrust, bounced and rolled along the dark wet tarmac.

Inside the jet, Napoleon looked out the small round window next to his head. “Ah,” he said. “London.”

Illya looked past his shoulder to where the wing disappeared into the gray nothingness that cloaked the plane. “How can you tell?”

“I have a boundless faith in Trans World Airlines, Illya. They told us we were going to London, and since we have arrived somewhere, I can only presume…”

The plane rolled to a stop, and a stewardess came up the aisle to open the forward hatch. The two U.N.C.L.E. agents were among the first out, and were greeted with a freezing drizzle as they stepped onto the top of the wheeled stairs. Napoleon hunched his shoulders and turned up his collar. “Ah, to be in April,” he said wryly, “now that England’s here.”

“Cheer up,” said Illya as they hurried towards the warmth of the customs house, “It was probably worse in April.”

At three the following afternoon, they entered an outer office at Scotland Yard. A uniformed constable had guided them through the maze of concrete, steel and glass, having to stop twice himself to check wall-mounted directories. He was quite candid in his

admission - “We still haven’t really gotten settled in, sir. It’s a much larger place than the old Yard, and I’m afraid it’ll take some getting used to.”

Napoleon was frankly lost after the first few minutes. He half suspected Illya might be as well, but the Russian would never have admitted it. The building was beautiful, in a sleek, shiny way, but somehow it seemed to clash with the traditionally uniformed officers who moved about its corridors, looking more like costumed extras on a futuristic movie set than the enforcement arm of one of the world’s most highly regarded civilian police forces.

The trim girl in a feminized version of the same uniform sat behind a sleek desk, and looked up as they entered.

“Solo and Kuryakin,” Napoleon said as they came in. “Here to see Inspector West.”

“He’s occupied at the moment,” she said. “I’ll tell him you’re here.” She ticked a tab on a shiny intercom unit, and a voice answered faintly. “The men from U.N.C.L.E. are here, sir.”

“Excellent,” said the other end. “Send them right in. Oh, see that Claude gets the latest additions to the Rollison file, will you?”

“Certainly, sir.”

The inner door opened and a stomach walked out, closely followed by a red-faced man carrying a bowler hat. He glanced at them sleepily as he paused by the desk, and as the secretary flipped through a drawer he unpackaged a stick of gum and engulfed it.

Solo and his partner stepped through the still-open door into a crisply furnished office which still smelled slightly of paint. Behind the desk a remarkably handsome man rose to greet them.

“Mr. Solo - Mr. Kuryakin,” he said, shaking hands warmly. “I’m honored. Your reputations have preceded you.”

Illya smiled as he accepted a chair. “You are well known to us, too, Inspector. Our superiors think highly of you - one reason we were sent here.”

The Inspector’s mouth twisted into a wry smile. “Yes - I’m afraid the subject of your mission has also preceded you. It’s about this Rainbow nonsense, isn’t it?”

“It is in regard to Johnnie Rainbow, Inspector,” said Napoleon. “But, ah, our sources consider it to be quite a bit more than nonsense. Data on Johnnie and his activities have been correlated from several directions.”

West shook his head. “We at the Yard are well enough acquainted with the Rainbow story. We haven’t traced the source of the rumor yet, but it has been demonstrated to our satisfaction that there is no such individual as this ‘Johnnie Rainbow.’ He’s a sort of legendary idealization the criminal elements have created, much in the manner of the Robin Hood Ballads of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries. Let me put your minds at ease at once - there is no ‘Johnnie Rainbow.’”

“How do you account,” Illya asked, “for the recent success of large-scale crime all over England? I believe thieves have been netting an average of some three hundred pounds a week for the last few months.”

“Highly biased figures, Mr. Kuryakin. Highly biased. They include a few fortunate coups on a large scale. There is no connection among them - except possibly for inspiration. One large haul gets into the newspapers, and some other gang is tempted to try it. That’s all.”

“But the methods of operation seem so similar,” said Napoleon. “From what we’d heard it seemed as if every operation could have been planned by the same man. The organization, the choice of targets, the timing, and especially the lack of violence - all point to the same source.”

“By no means,” the Inspector stated flatly. “Several robberies have not fallen into these categories. A jewel robbery a few months ago was quite badly bungled, and a shopkeeper shot. It happens with increasing frequency. We caught the killer, of course.”

“And of course he had no connection with the Rainbow gang.”

“Mr. Solo, there is no Rainbow gang. He was completely independent, wanted for questioning on two other jobs, had done penal servitude twice. A typical old lag, far out of his depth. Should have stuck with second-story work.”

Illya leaned back in the form-fitting chair. “We do not maintain that Johnnie Rainbow is responsible for every crime committed in the British Isles, Inspector; merely that he is the motivating intelligence behind the most successful ones.”

The Scotland Yard man sighed and leaned his elbows on the desk top. “Mr. Kuryakin, admittedly we have little to go on in the Rothschild robbery so far. But we have some of the participants identified, and are expecting to make arrests momentarily.”

The Russian scowled. “We aren’t reporters, Inspector. You don’t have to quote press releases at us. As I recall, you have had the eleven men who robbed the Royal Mail almost four years ago identified for some time, and the last I heard you were still expecting to make arrests momentarily.”

“There’s no need to be rude, Mr. Kuryakin. Everyone takes our successes for granted, and only our failures receive widespread notice. We have hardly closed the books on the Royal Mail job - one of the robbers was taken only a few months ago.”

“And he denies ever having heard of Johnnie Rainbow?

“We didn’t feel the question worth asking. Scotland Yard is always bombarded with crackpot theories after every major crime; when you’ve worked here a while you get so you can smell out the worthless ones. The idea of a secret criminal mastermind went out of vogue even among the pulp writers some two decades ago, but the well-meaning citizens…”

The intercom buzzed, and he answered it.

“Inspector Seagoon on line two, sir.”

Nodding a wordless apology to Napoleon and Illya, Inspector West picked up the telephone. “Hello, Neddie. You got my memo? Fine. Look, I’m somewhat occupied at the moment, but could we meet for dinner? Very good. The usual place. See you shortly after seven, then.” He disconnected, and turned back to his visitors.

Illya spoke first. “I can’t really see calling one of your own Detective Superintendents a crackpot. After all…”

West sighed. “You’ve read the book.”

“Book?” asked Napoleon.

“A retired D.S. has written a book on the robbery. His sources have been feeding him the Rainbow story, and he has accepted it. But of course, being retired, he has no official connection with the Yard, and we have given his theory every reasonable consideration and found it actually quite untenable.”

There was a long uncomfortable pause. It was be coming increasingly obvious to Napoleon that they were getting nowhere. Well, Waverly had told them not to expect much cooperation from Scotland Yard - and as usual, he was right.

After several seconds their host stood up. “I’m really sorry we can’t help you. But rest assured; Johnnie Rainbow is as imaginary as Robin Hood or King Arthur. Those jobs have all been organized and executed by independent criminals. No mysterious genius hiding in a dingy flat in Brighton - just ordinary small-time crooks who’ve gotten inspired and lucky at the same time. And their luck is running out.”

Napoleon and Illya stood as well, and shook the proffered hand. “Now will you be able to find your way out again, or shall I call a sergeant to guide you?” the Inspector asked, only half joking.

“I think we can find our way back to the street,” said Illya, who would never admit to being lost.

“Getting out is much easier than getting in,” the Yarder agreed, as he saw them to the door. “Not much like the old place, is it?”

“Hard to imagine anything less like it,” Napoleon admitted.

West laughed easily. “Actually, I’m not at all used to it yet. I much preferred the feeling about the old Yard. But we were desperately in need of the space for records and files. We’re computerizing, you know: most complete set of fingerprints, mug shots and criminal records in Europe. From a few apparently unconnected pieces of data on a crime, our machines will be able to pick out a list of likely suspects complete with their records and last known addresses in seconds.”

Illya smiled coolly. “It doesn’t seem to be doing you much good at the moment.”

“It’s doing its job. But even the best computer is no better than the data fed it. The human equation will never be removed from

detection until it is removed from crime as well. Good afternoon, Mr. Solo - Mr. Kuryakin. Please take my advice, and leave the pursuit of criminals to us. Surely the U.N.C.L.E. has more important things to do than run after bank robbers."

Illya looked at him and Napoleon suppressed a grin. "I've had that thought myself," the Russian agent admitted. "But I don't pick our assignments."

"Well, I wish you the best of luck on this one, though I doubt if you'll have any as long as you insist on chasing Rainbows." He chuckled, and closed the door behind them.

Solo looked at it and said softly, "Chasing Rainbows. Bleah."

The secretary looked up. "I beg your pardon?"

"Nothing - just an involuntary exclamation on my friend's part," said Illya, and they stepped out into the corridor, closing the frosted glass door gently behind them.

He looked at Napoleon as they started off toward the elevator, and said, "Well?"

"Not very. He seemed pretty certain, didn't he?"

The Russian nodded. "Perhaps a little too certain. He stated the official position with great clarity, however, and no little redundancy. Are you convinced?"

"I almost was," said Napoleon as he touched the lift button and the doors sighed open. "Until he said Johnnie Rainbow was as imaginary as Robin Hood and King Arthur. Personally, I've always believed in King Arthur, and the existence of Robin Hood never seemed to be open to doubt."

"The point is well taken," said Illya as they stepped out into the main floor corridor and started toward the daylight. "Perhaps the good Inspector was telling the absolute truth after all when he compared the three of them."

Napoleon paused at the door and looked at his partner. "Arc you starting to believe we might actually have some purpose here after all?"

“I will have to admit the concept has begun to cross my mind. You may remember from a year ago that the greatest advantage a real vampire would have in the modem world is that no one would believe in him. *If* Johnnie Rainbow exists, he is in an enviable position.”

“Especially since his existence is not only ignored, but vigorously denied…” said Napoleon thoughtfully, as they reclaimed their rented Lotus and came out of the underground parking area into the bright afternoon sun light.

“Suppose Rainbow does exist,” said Illya, leaning back in the bucket seat as Napoleon piloted the little car through the knotted streets and clotted traffic which filled central London at that hour of the afternoon. “None of the men who actually committed the robberies would admit his existence; they’d be well-paid when they’d served their time, or more likely sprung, smuggled abroad, and paid off there. And since they won’t bring the subject up, and Scotland Yard won’t ask them, it seems highly unlikely that Johnnie will ever be called to account for his crimes unless you and I take a hand in things.”

“My thoughts exactly,” said his partner. “He may or may not exist, but personally I wouldn’t feel comfortable going home until I have proven either possibility to my own satisfaction.”

“And Mr. Waverly’s.”

“Yes. And Mr. Waverly’s. We shall start early tomorrow morning - or possibly early tomorrow afternoon. It will be another day or so before my body has readjusted to London time. My stomach, too. What would you say to dinner at this relatively early hour?”

“It sounds most appetizing. I presume you had some place specific in mind?”

“I know an excellent little Italian restaurant, a similar German restaurant, as well as French, Chinese, Armenian, Spanish and Scandinavian restaurants. There’s even one specializing in genuine southern-fried chicken.”

“And all of them are in the same block in Soho.”

“Same three blocks, except for the French one. Let’s hit the Chinese one tonight; then we can eat another dinner at nine or ten,

and be closer to the local scheduling.

Illya nodded, and the little red car veered east.

Chapter 3

How Napoleon and Illya Toured Soho, and Two Other Gentlemen Debated at Length

“IF I’D REMEMBED the parking situation was so bad, I’d have left the car back at the hotel and taken the Underground,” Napoleon said, as they wandered through the colorful back streets of the Soho district. They’d found a parking area in Ramillies Places, just off Oxford Street, and had followed directions from there to the restaurant. Now, with a pair of full meals inside them, they felt ready for a matching pair of warm beds. Thus it was with honest reluctance that Illya felt constrained lo call to his partner’s attention something he had just noticed.

“Napoleon - I truly hate to bring this up, but we are being followed.”

Solo sighed deeply and nodded. “Since we left the restaurant. I didn’t want to mention it; I was hoping they’d go away. But they made the last two turns right with us, didn’t they?”

“Uh-huh. You don’t imagine it’s anything as simple and commonplace as a pair of muggers, do you?”

“Afraid not.”

Neither of them had raised his voice above a murmur during this exchange, nor had they broken stride. Aware of the dangers that could be waiting in the dark doorways of the buildings they passed, they kept their attention divided between the sounds of footfalls behind them and the silent shadows that lurked ahead.

Then an alley mouth gaped on their left, and a solitary streetlight a dozen yards away showed a single right turn. They ducked in and around the corner, where two metal plates high on the side of the building marked the juncture of Newburgh and Broadwick Streets. They froze there, listening.

The soft crunch of shoe soles on pavement paused at the entrance to Broadwick, then began to approach cautiously. Running softly on rubber-soled feet, Napoleon and Illya made another quick left into Canton and then a right. The street they found themselves in was brilliantly lit, and lined with small, intricately decorated shops. Illya looked quickly around.

“I know where we are now,” he said softly. “Regent Street is just a block further west. Somehow I think it would be safer to take a bus back to the hotel than to attempt to retrieve the car at this point.”

Solo nodded complete agreement as Illya continued, “The next corner is Foubert’s Place. We go left there, and hurry.”

As they moved briskly forward, two large men stepped out from between the shops to the right, and stood with their arms folded, blocking the way. The U.N.C.L.E. agents stopped and glanced back. Two more were approaching from behind.

Napoleon looked at his partner. “No, I don’t think they’re ordinary muggers.”

“In fact,” said Illya thoughtfully, “I think they’re Lascars.”

At that moment all four of the men sprang into action, closing in on their quarry. Napoleon and Illya had their backs to the brick wall, and dropped into the trained fighter’s defensive crouch. Their attackers paused and half-circled them warily, then moved in more slowly.

Solo automatically left the right-hand pair to his partner, and took the other two himself. After waiting for a few seconds for the Lascars to make the first move, he suddenly sprang into action. A karate kick at the stomach of the first missed by a fraction of an inch as the stomach withdrew. Only the wall at his back saved him from a severe loss of balance, and the twist of his body let his ankle slip from the hands that grabbed for it. He recovered in a fraction of a second and swung a vicious chop at an exposed rib cage. The shock of a solid connection thrilled up his arm, and an agonized grunt rewarded him.

In the same moment, Illya feinted for the throat of one Lascar and shifted his attack to the face of the other. In a flurry of chops and kicks one of them went down while the other stumbled blindly back, clutching at his streaming nose. Illya’s shoulder ached from a near

miss with a weighted cosh one of them had swung, but he turned to help his partner.

Napoleon had knocked the wind out of one with a direct thrust to the solar plexus, and had squared with the other as Illya came up. But instead of joining battle the survivor whipped something from his pocket to his mouth as he jumped back, and blew an eerie trill on some kind of whistle. A moment later small bursts of smoke puffed around the U.N.C.L.E. agents as gas-shells splattered against the bricks. In a matter of seconds they lay crumpled on the pavement, and more silent figures materialized from the shadows to bear them away.

Less than a mile away through the tangled maze of alleys that is Soho, two men sat facing each other in a small, dimly-lit room. The walls of the room were hung about with brocades of the finest silk, and drifting clouds of incense thickened the air. Dominating the room was a great teakwood desk, intricately carved and inlaid.

Behind this desk sat a tall, thin Chinese, wearing robes of silk which shimmered in the candlelight. His face was unlined, but his eyes were old with ancient wisdom, and seemed oddly veiled, like those of a drowsing cat. Above an imposing brow, he wore a black skullcap with a single coral bead which indicated the rank of Mandarin. A marmoset perched on his shoulder, occasionally nuzzling his ear.

His visitor sat primly on the edge of a deeply cushioned straight-backed chair, a slim briefcase balanced on his knees with a tightly furled umbrella and a bowler hat laid across it. He wore an utterly undistinguished gray suit, and he was addressing the Chinese gentleman.

“All these things my organization is prepared to offer you if you will join forces with us. The finest laboratories in the world will be at your disposal, with armies of expert technicians. Your researches may proceed in all the fields your genius encompasses without fear of interference from outside forces. In addition, your supervisory abilities would continue to be utilized…”

Somewhere a single soft note chimed, and the man in the gray suit paused, looking around. The Mandarin leaned slightly forward and touched a button on his desk, then spoke briefly in his native tongue. Without waiting for an answer he released the button, and addressed his guest.

“I beg pardon. An important operation has been successfully completed. Please continue; we will not be disturbed again.” He spoke English without the least accent, save perhaps a slight emphasis on the sibilants.

The man in the gray suit nodded slightly. “Your network is falling apart, to speak bluntly. Your homeland is in the hands of the Communists, your old enemies. If you were to return, you would be subjected to a most protracted and ignominious execution as a representative of the old regime which they wish to see completely eradicated. Your own people have turned against you.”

For a moment the membranous shields seemed to flicker back from the old man’s eyes, which flashed an amazing green in the yellow light of the candles. “My people have been misled for centuries. Even now my agents within China are fomenting a revolution which will sweep that fat peasant Mao from his seat of power and replace him with men of wisdom and sanity.”

His visitor laughed with a hint of condescension. “Very well. Perhaps it may be so. But in the Western World you are no more than an anachronism. Crime on an international scale is no longer the province of the gifted amateur, or the inspired technician. It is big business. It has no room for the cult of the personality, for the single vulnerable leader. As in other businesses, to be truly secure and successful, no single person is irreplaceable.”

The old Chinese seemed to withdraw slightly, his eyes now hooded like a cobra’s. But his voice was still soft and even. “I am many things in many lands; but I have never considered myself a criminal. Neither have I any concern for my own security. As for my vulnerability - the thin lips curled slightly - “my record speaks for itself.”

“You have, admittedly, been lucky in your dealings with the law. But have you given any thought to the day that must eventually

come when your luck will fail? Only an organization the size of Thrush can protect you and preserve your brilliance for the future. With us you will be free to work on your own projects, with your own personnel. Equipment and materials are no longer as inexpensive or as easy to find as they used to he, you know."

"You modern Englishmen are indeed thoughtful. Please tell me - are you actually attempting to sell me life insurance?"

The man in the gray suit regarded his host closely, but did not deign to smile. "I am trying to find out whether or not you are aware of the way things are," he said steadily. "There is no place for you and your kind in the modem world. You must go the way of the corner grocery and the independent manufacturer. You must adapt to changing conditions or be overwhelmed by the growth of more modern operations." He paused, and swallowed the anger that had come perilously close to the surface. His voice was calmer when he spoke again.

"This is not a threat - just a simple statement of circumstances. Your reputation is widely known and respected in the fields of applied psychology, biochemistry and biophysics. There is not another man living who is your equal at hypnosis. You are a valuable man in many respects, and Thrush is willing to reward you accordingly for your services. What is your answer?"

The old Chinese brought his eyes to focus on the Thrush's face. "Your offer has points worth considering," he said at last. "But I fear I would not be able to give you a definite answer without much thought and consultation with my ancestors, There are many factors which you have not taken into account, and many of which you are quite unaware."

"Of course the organization is willing to be patient. But you have been putting off our representatives for some time, you will admit, and…"

"Do not speak to me of patience, Englishman. Your race is young, and has not learned the simpler virtues of the mind. My race was already decadent when your ancestors were staining themselves blue. But I will accommodate your haste. The next fourteen days will bring changes to the fortunes of many - some for the better, others

for the worse. Come speak with me again in two week's time, and I will give you an answer to take back to your leaders. If you acquit yourselves well, perhaps I may join you."

"My superiors will not be pleased with another delay. They may deem it necessary to give you a demonstration of their powers in the hopes of influencing your decision."

"I will await their leisure as they have so kindly awaited mine." The voice was almost a whisper, and the eyes were green sparks behind slitted lids. "But I fear I have kept you from your most important business far too long. Please accept my most humble apologies for the continued delay, and convey my very best wishes to superiors."

He made no move, touched no buttons, but the curtains at one side of the room parted and two huge swarthy men with shaven heads came into the chamber, taking positions with arms folded on either side of the entrance. The man in the gray suit stood, gripping his briefcase. His voice was only a bit less than perfectly even. "In two weeks' time, then. Very well. It may be that by then you will begin to appreciate the powers of Thrush."

The old Chinese gave no sign that he had heard the thinly veiled threat, and with a quick glance at the impassive Lascars flanking the door, the man in the gray suit took his leave.

As the two guards followed him out and the curtains fell soundlessly back into place, the faint dry whisper of something like rustling leaves might have been heard in the room. Only the most acute observer might have realized that it came from between the parted lips of he Mandarin, and even such a one might not have recognized it as quiet, sardonic laughter.

In a basement room only a few feet away, two of the factors of which Thrush was quite unaware were struggling back to consciousness. Solo had inhaled a little less of the gas than his partner, and was the first to recover awareness of his surroundings, but even so he had not decided quite where they were when Illya began to stir.

“Welcome back to the land of the living,” he greeted the Russian wryly. “We’ve been packed away somewhere, and I think it’s somebody’s basement. A rat ran across my feet a minute or so ago.”

“I hope you kicked him.”

“Certainly not. If we treat him nicely, maybe he’ll come back and chew through our ropes. I’ve heard of it happening.”

“I’d prefer to get out without any help from you furry friends, Napoleon.” Illya squirmed around a little, checking his bonds. “As near as I can tell, we haven’t even been disarmed - just temporarily incapacitated.”

“It looks as if either Johnnie Rainbow has decided to get us off his trail, or Scotland Yard has developed a new method of dealing with troublemakers. Can you think of anyone else we’ve offended recently?”

“How much of a tip did you leave at the restaurant?”

“Twenty percent - my usual. They never objected before.”

“Well, whoever it was certainly knows their ropes. These won’t even budge. In fact, I can hardly shift around without nearly pulling my thumbs out of their sockets. It’s an East Indian type of binding, which was what led me to think of the restaurant. Knowing your propensity for making enemies…” Illya broke off suddenly. “What was that?”

Before Napoleon could phrase a suitable reply, he heard the same sound. A faint scraping in the wall to their left. A moment later a section of paneling slid back and a tiny slender Oriental girl slipped out, followed a moment later by a tall gaunt Englishman in a trench coat. The girl spoke swiftly in a whisper. “See? They are here as I said.”

The Englishman hurried to them and bent over. Napoleon started to speak. “I have several obvious questions to ask…”

“Sorry, old chap. No time. This young lady has placed her life in our hands by bringing me to you; we mustn’t trifle with it. The fellow who had you brought here is a fiend in human shape - make no mistake. When he finds you gone, all the furies will be set loose.”

The girl knelt daintily to help him loosen the ropes. In the dim light, Napoleon could see that her eyes were a startling shade of violet such as he had never seen be re. “My master plays an intricate game, and you both are but pieces. You were to be used to bargain with a group that seeks his wisdom.”

“Who is your master, anyway?” asked Illya as his lands came free.

Her hand came to her mouth in a peculiar gesture. “I dare not speak his name,” she said fearfully.

The lean Englishman helped Napoleon to his feet. “Don’t ask too many questions, chaps. Where ignorance is bliss, and so on. Her master may not be as well known these days as the people you’re after, but he’s every bit dangerous in his own way. Now, come on. We’ll head out the way we came in. And keep silent, as you value your lives!”

The dim yellow beam of a pocket torch led them trough a narrow, foul-smelling maze of tunnels, which eventually brought them out where the Thames lapped, black and oily under the city-lit overcast, at slime-crusted pilings and crumbling masonry. “Afraid you’ll have to make your way home from here. I must get this little lady to a place of safety, if there is such in this world.”

“But who…”

“No time to talk now. Telephone me tomorrow WHItehall 9213. I know what you’re after, and I think I can help you find it. Cheerio.” And the blackness swallowed him up.

The two U.N.C.L.E. agents stood looking at each other in the dark for several seconds, until Napoleon said, “I don’t know about you, but I’m not especially crazy about the smell around here. What do you say we head for home?”

“Sounds reasonable. Maybe we can stop off for a bite to eat on the way. It’s been several hours since we ate and I’m hungry again.”

“Fine. One thing - let’s not talk about anything that happened tonight until we’ve had time to think about it.”

Illya nodded thoughtfully, and followed his partner up the chipped cement stairs to the street above.

Chapter 4

How MI-5 Spoke Condescendingly of Its Rival, and Took an Opposing Stand on the Main Topic

NAPOLEON REPLACED the telephone with a puzzled look on his face.

“Did you reach our friend from last night?” Illya asked after a moment when no comment was volunteered.

“Yes,” said Napoleon, “I did. I’m still not sure who he is, but he told me to go to a friend of his in the Foreign Office if we were interested in some quasi-official cooperation on the problem of Johnnie Rainbow.”

“Who?”

“Somebody in MI-5, apparently. He wasn’t about to spell out the name for me; I got the impression he expected me to know who he was talking about. Very strange…”

“MI-5? What business would military intelligence have with a bank robber?”

Solo shrugged. “What business do *we* have with a bank robber, since you ask. There seem to be more aspects to this mess than anyone suspected. Personally, I’m beginning to doubt if we’ll ever untangle all of them.”

“I’d be satisfied to untangle just one or two of them and go home,” said Illya. “This whole operation feels wrong to me.”

“You’re just being Slavic. We’re trained and equipped to fight crime on an international scale, and if two million pounds isn’t an international sum of money, I don’t know what is. I can name several small countries you could practically buy on the open market for that amount in ready cash.”

“Spare me the justifications. If Mr. Waverly assigns me to write traffic tickets in Tierra del Fuego, I’ll do it, even if I don’t understand

why."

"Good fellow," said Napoleon reassuringly. "There are times when unquestioning obedience is still a virtue. Come on - let's pop over to this address our anonymous rescuer gave me, and see whether it puts us any closer to the end of the Rainbow and a two-million-pound pot of gold."

"Address? I thought you said we were going to the Foreign Office. That's in Whitehall."

"I know. But this individual isn't. Apparently he prefers to work out of his own flat, which is about a quarter of a mile away, overlooking St. James' Park, if I interpret this address correctly."

Illya shook his head. "Anonymity seems to be a passion with these people," he said.

"Remember, they first came up with the idea of giving their secret agents numbers rather than code names. Double-Ought-What'shisname, for example."

"Well, let's hope we don't run into *him*. We seem bound to encounter everyone else engaged in the never-ending fight against crime."

Napoleon smiled as he slipped into his coat, for the May wind was likely to be chilly, and picked up the umbrella he had purchased the previous day. Slinging it jauntily over his arm, he preceded his somewhat dour partner out the door.

Saint James' Park was a fine fresh green lawn in the early afternoon sunshine, still sparkling from the morning's sprinkle. The air was clean and crisp, and all London seemed to have been sluiced free of smoke and haze. The two agents mounted the steps of a stately house standing shoulder-braced between a pair of identical brownstones, and touched a bell beneath one of four speaking tubes. A moment later a voice filtered out, asking the obvious.

"Mister Solo and Mister Kuryakin, from New York. I believe we are expected."

Though the exact phraseology was not quite clear, the voice seemed to invite them in, and a second or two later the lock on the door to their left chattered as the electrical latch operated.

A flight of carpeted steps, led them up to a dimly lit landing, where they could distinguish three figures apparently finishing a conversation. At the top Napoleon looked around a little uneasily, wondering just who they were there to see.

He hoped it was the girl, a sleek aristocratic redhead who gave him a single, direct, slightly insolent glance and proceeded to ignore him; but she seemed to be with the elegantly, almost foppishly dressed gentlemen who was already settling a bowler above his broad British face with mathematical precision. He gave Solo and Illya a warm and sincere smile as he did so, speaking to the third man.

“You may as well spare the introductions, old man. I doubt that we shall be meeting these chaps again.”

“I shouldn’t be too sure,” said the other, a short, spare man with bright eyes and a lined face. “You have a great deal in common, you know.”

“That may be,” said the girl, “but I’m not sure I’d care to find out how much.” She gave Napoleon a longer, appraising look.

“Stop tempting Mr. Solo, you little minx,” said the small man, chidingly. “He’s here on business, and you must be off on yours.” He made little shooing motions with his hands, and the couple turned with a cheerful “Good afternoon” floating behind them.

The small man led the way to the front room, where a small fireplace held ashes reminiscent of the previous evening’s chill. Their host indicated two chairs and took a third himself, speaking as he sat.

“I must apologize for all the secrecy,” he said. “But this Rainbow business has gotten completely out of hand, and we’re officially bound up in red tape. Legally, I can’t do a thing to help you, because legally I don’t know a bit about what’s going on.”

“That puts you on a level with us,” said Illya. “I must admit to being more than a little confused by all these goings on. The only people

who don’t act like criminals are Scotland Yard, and they deny everything. Is there anything you can tell us, and if not, what are we doing here?”

Their host laughed delightedly, leaning back in his chair. “Of course, of course,” he said. “I imagine this all seems like a game of blind man’s bluff by now - well, in a way it is. But I’ve been wanting to get in touch with you since I heard you were coming over after the Rainbow gang. Something has to be done, and quickly. Scotland Yard won’t, and I can’t. My people aren’t equipped or empowered to work inside the country, except for a few - the couple you just met, for example. Well, not both of them, actually. The man is one of our top professionals; the woman is a talented amateur.”

“Amateur what?” asked Napoleon suspiciously.

“Practically everything,” said the small man with a chuckle. “She’s tried everything else, succeeding superbly at all of it, and now she’s taking a shot at the wider reaches of counter-intelligence. But that’s not what you’re supposed to be interested in. Did you come here to chase girls or Rainbows?”

“Well,” said Napoleon uncertainly, but his partner interrupted him.

“We’ve heard that particular pun three times in the last two days, and it’s already getting stale. I don’t want to seem impolite, but to be perfectly honest, I’m not at all happy with the way things have been going. If you can help us, we would appreciate it. If you can’t, we have better things to do than make conversation.”

The smile faded from their host’s face during this speech and he nodded. “Sorry. More or less trying to set you at ease before getting into business. All right - we’ll omit the social niceties. According to my sources in the Yard, there’s a jewel robbery expected in New Bond Street tomorrow night. The site will be staked out, and a full bag of game is confidently expected. I think you might enjoy participating in the haul.”

“Knocking over a jewelry store isn’t the sort of operation the Rainbow gang usually pulls - they seem to specialize in goods in transit.”

“The Rainbow gang is not directly responsible for Britain’s entire crime wave - Johnnie seems to be selling advice to anyone who is interested in pulling a large job of any kind. This is one. I have other sources than Scotland Yard.”

“What useful purpose would be served by our attending the party?”

“Possibly none,” their host admitted. “It is quite possible that warning has leaked back to the gang somehow and there may be nothing happening after all. But you would have an opportunity to talk to the prisoners before the purblind police give them any ideas of what they can hide and get away with. I’ve talked with some of the old lags after just a few hours of routine interrogation, and they’ve never heard of a Rainbow by that time. If you were able to confront them with a changed attitude towards him, they might be persuaded to come across with something valuable.”

Illya considered this with full suspicion for some time, and then reluctantly admitted the idea’s validity. “I presume your contacts in the Yard are sufficiently highly placed that they could fit us into the party without a great deal of fuss and complaint?”

“Certainly. A Chief Inspector vouching for you will serve as a pass to all sorts of social functions.”

“I, ah, have a few more questions,” Napoleon said hesitantly. “If you don’t mind…?”

“Of course not. I never mind being asked questions, if you don’t mind them not being answered. Go ahead.”

“You *are* with MI-5, aren’t you?”

“Yes - I thought you knew that.”

“We’d been told; it’s not always the same thing. Are you working under assignment on this, or independently out of pure personal interest?”

“Mostly the latter, I’m afraid. That’s why I can’t be along with you tomorrow evening. As for your part in it, I may as well tell you I was asked to give you a hand by Alexander Waverly. We worked together during the last war, and earlier. Before Department Zed got him and they set out to invent U.N.C.L.E. Didn’t he tell you?”

Illya sighed. “Nobody seems to be telling us anything.”

“Oh, now, that’s less than polite. Admittedly I have hardly been making a clean breast of my darkest secrets, but I do think some of what I’ve said may be of some help to you.”

“I’m afraid it hasn’t really,” Napoleon said. “We’re not very used to working in total darkness, and we haven’t had much else this trip. We don’t know who anybody is or which side they’re on…”

“There are quite a few more than the usual two sides, which may be confusing matters a little,” their host said. “There’s Johnnie Rainbow, of course; and there’s Thrush, which wants him to join them; and you, who want to stop Thrush but aren’t that interested in Rainbow; Scotland Yard, who has little interest in Thrush, and who doesn’t believe in Johnnie but wants to stop him anyway; and several individuals who are either being pulled in by Thrush or drawn in by interest in picking off some of the loot the Rainbow gang has in various secure stashes about the country, and of course various arms of the law are following them. In fact, if you traced out everyone who was somehow concerned with this operation of yours, you would end by involving practically every criminal and everyone actively connected with law enforcement from John O’Groats to Lands End. Everyone I can think of off-hand either is personally involved or has a friend or enemy who is, one way or another.

“I would predict that until this business is resolved one way or another, you will continue to encounter people whose concern seems serious if peripheral. Many of them you will find useful; some you will find dangerous. I presume you can utilize the former and avoid the latter.”

There was a long pause, broken at last by Illya, who nodded slowly. “I begin to see. Everyone has some portion of the action, but no one besides ourselves is pointed directly at the center - which is to say Johnnie Rainbow. This is why all the fuss and interest around us.”

“Precisely. You two are probably - hopefully - the key to the entire complex situation, tugging away at the key stone of the arch which in turn supports the entire pile of masonry.”

“It sounds like a dangerous position.”

“It is. But if you couldn’t take care of yourselves you wouldn’t be here.” He glanced at the mantle clock and stood suddenly. “Now you must pardon me. You will be picked up tomorrow evening about eleven. Have fun; I wish I could join you.”

They were accompanied down the stairs to the ground floor, and even out the door. It was late afternoon, and shadows were lengthening across the park. Their host looked up and down the street. “You didn’t drive over? I should have rung for a cab. Ah - never mind. Here comes one now. I always seem to be lucky with taxis; always can find one when I need one. Good afternoon, gentlemen. Been most pleasant talking with you - hope we may get together again.”

He popped them into the taxi, gave the driver the address of their hotel, and disappeared behind them in a grinding of gears and a cloud of exhaust.

Napoleon and Illya looked at each other. Finally the American spoke. “Well, I don’t know about you, but although it seemed to me at the time he was explaining everything clearly, I’m still just as confused as I was when we went up there.”

Illya nodded agreement. “Nevertheless I fully expect to be picked up at precisely eleven o’clock tomorrow night by a car full of detectives. I developed the distinct impression that the fellow we just spent half an hour listening to knows very well what he is doing and saying - and more important, not saying. Somehow, though still quite in the dark, I feel better about it.”

Solo settled back in the comfortable seat and wondered as he reached for a cigarette whether all the threads in the complicated skein would ever be fully unraveled for him. Or, for that matter, if any of them would. He drew the smoke deep into his lungs and let it trickle out. Only time would tell.

Section II

“Look Upon The Rainbow”

Chapter 5

How Illya Kuryakin Heard a Discourse on Weaponry, and A Good Time Was Had By All

THE NIGHT WAS clear and even moderately warm, for London, which is to say the overcoats were barely necessary. The small squad of uniformed policemen had arrived quietly from various routes to station themselves in hiding at a dozen or more locations within a block radius of the suspected target. Napoleon and Illya sat inside a parked van with two other men on a cross-street facing the jewelry shop, and watched it alternately through the concealed slits in the side paneling.

The distant chime of Big Ben echoed over the sleeping city, tolling one o'clock, and eventually two. Cars passed occasionally, and one or two lonely pedestrians hurried along the street as the men sat patiently waiting. There was little conversation among them; like soldiers before a battle they kept the company of their own thoughts.

From time to time a small transceiver would hiss to life as one or another of the concealed cordon of watchers reported someone entering the controlled area; pedestrians and vehicles were under almost constant surveillance from one point or another as long as they remained in the four-block area under study.

It was about two-fifteen when an unmarked motor truck purred into their view and stopped next to the target shop. A moment later the front door of the shop opened and three men carrying large flat cases and a couple of sacks hurried out. The head of the stake-out party swore under his breath.

"Death and destruction! They must have been in there all along, working happily on the alarm system and cracking the box while we sat out here waiting for them to show up."

He gripped the talk-switch on the transmitter micro phone and spoke quietly into it. "Border posts - establish blocks. Let no one in or

out. Observation posts - converge on the shop. Remember, these men may be armed. They've never used firearms on a job before, but there can always be a first time. Maintain security; don't let them know we're coming."

He ceased transmission, and Napoleon reported from the observation slit, "The three men are going back for another load. How much evidence do you need?"

"A single handful will be quite sufficient. Let's move in."

"Shouldn't you address them through a loud-hailer and offer them a chance to surrender peacefully?" asked Illya.

"Perhaps. But we would greatly prefer not to disturb the sleep of honest residents of the area with bullhorns and shouted threats. They should realize they are severely outnumbered as soon as the officers begin to show themselves from all the streets."

He half rose from his crouch and opened the back double doors of the van. Moments later all four of them stood in the shadows, watching the three robbers emerge once again from the shop with armloads of loot. The Scotland Yard man said, in an even voice pitched just loud enough to carry clearly across the silent street, "I think that will be enough, gentlemen."

The effect was all that could be desired. Two of the three men dropped their bundles and jumped for the truck; the third, apparently confused, stepped back, seeking the safety of the shop entrance.

Walking steadily towards them, flanked by Napoleon, Illya, and his aide, the Yarder continued to address the robbers. "I hereby place you all under arrest in the name of the Queen, and advise you that anything you say may he taken down and used in evidence against you. I further advise you that this entire area is surrounded by policemen, and you haven't a chance of escape. So you'd best come along quietly."

Constables in uniform were beginning to emerge from various hiding places, converging on the truck. More than fifteen officers were now around the truck, including the two U.N.C.L.E. agents. Its back doors were tightly closed, and the motor was ticking over slowly, but no attempt had been made to start it moving.

The nearest policeman threw an order towards the cab: “Stop your engine and dismount with your hands up.

Suddenly all hell seemed to break loose. The back doors of the truck burst open, and at least forty men came leaping out, armed with truncheons and various similar forms of life-preservers. They took on the representatives of the law in groups of three, and in a matter of seconds a fierce and desperate melee had begun.

Napoleon and Illya were far enough from the truck to react to the sudden attack. Solo whipped out his gun and shouted, “Stand clear or I’ll shoot!” Even he himself, looking back on it later, admitted that it sounded rather foolish, but with only the standard eight-round clip against some two score men, all he could do was attempt a threat.

It proved to be no more than that, as an accurately thrown tire iron cracked him viciously across the wrist and his U.N.C.L.E. Special Hew from his hand. Before he could even draw breath, four toughs were swarming over him. With his right wrist severely bruised and possibly broken, he was in less than perfect defensive shape. He called Illya’s name once as he went down, but the Russian had his attention fully occupied.

Four more unshaven mugs were moving in on him, exhibiting iron bars and self-confidence. Illya fell back a couple of steps, his glance flicking from one face to another. He heard his partner’s call without turning his head, and just at that moment all four charged him.

He leaped forward with a lightning-swift double kick that left one man writhing on the ground and another clutching at his shin and hopping about swearing profanely. The other two swung their iron bars at a sturdy figure that seemed to pass between them like a ghost, and struck only the uncomplaining air.

In the same fraction of time, Napoleon was struggling in the grip of eight strong arms. He had been unable to inflict any damage on his assailants, who had not given him the moment which Illya had taken to assess the situation, but had simply laid into him without pausing for formalities.

He managed to wrench his left arm loose, and delivered an adrenalin-charged chop to the first available neck. The grip on his left leg loosened, and he kicked, feeling something soft collapse

before his toe. This entire operation took something under two-thirds of a second, and before the thin hand of a hypothetical stopwatch could have finished marking off another full division his left hand had done something indescribable to the closest ear of the brute who was treating his damaged right wrist with much less than the respect it deserved.

A ham-like fist rebounded off the side of his head and his back slammed against the ground as flecks of light sparkled momentarily in his vision. Then, bracing his elbows against the pavement, he flipped sideways and I locked his legs around the neck of the fourth man. At the same time, his good hand was flailing about trying to connect with the man whose ear he had just mistreated.

While a scissors-hold is a convenient way of immobilizing an opponent, it also renders oneself relatively immobile. It was with a surge of relief that Napoleon saw his second attacker suddenly fold over himself and spread his unlovely features on the inoffensive cement. Illya was standing behind him, someone’s crowbar in his hand, looking down disapprovingly.

“Shall I clip the other one for you, or are you having fun?”

“You seem to wear out your playmates fast; you can have him if you like,” said Solo from the ground.

Admittedly there wasn’t much left for Illya to do; he took careful aim and tapped the last of the four on the side of the head with the rounded end of the bar. Napoleon unwound his legs and got unsteadily to his feet.

He was almost there when something came sailing through space at Illya. Solo’s free arm - his right - swung around to catch his partner behind the knees, and Illya dropped like an acrobat as another iron rod whipped through the space his head had occupied. Napoleon could hardly control a groan as pain lanced through his wrist again.

Illya was on his feet in an instant, taking off from a sprinter’s crouch in the direction of the main fight. The small force of police appeared outnumbered and several uniformed figures were stretched senseless on the pavement. In the distance, whistles and the distinctive two tone sirens could be heard heralding reinforcements, still a vital minute or two away.

Napoleon was hardly in a condition to rejoin the fight, but a momentary investigation of his right wrist revealed that it was in fact not quite broken after all. It also revealed that he could hold nothing heavy in his right hand. He picked up one of the opposition's crowbars in his left and waded back into the melee.

Illya, plunging into the thick of the struggle, found more targets than he expected. Oddly enough, he seemed to attract more attention than the uniformed officers, and within thirty seconds he found himself forced into strategic retreat in the face of overwhelming force. He fell back until the rough brick of a building front pressed against his spine, and then, as the semicircle of men appeared to close about him, he feinted right, then left, then ducked suddenly and decisively to his right, leaving another of the apparently inexhaustible army of bad guys gasping on the pavement.

Napoleon, regretfully, did not get nearly as far. Accepting the limitation of his injured arm, he would have felt satisfied to remain on the fringes of the battle, denting any skulls that came within his range. And, in fact, he left perhaps half a dozen heads so dented. There was the beginning of a respectable pile of victims growing around his feet when he became the focus of interest for several of the gang who seemed to have nothing better to do, having filled their individual quotas of incapacitated policemen.

They circled warily in front of him as he retired slowly, a step at a time, to make sure the solid side of the van was behind him. With a wall at his back and almost three feet of steel in his fist, he could stand them off for the seconds that remained before the fresh force of police would arrive and restore order. He heard the approaching sounds and took heart; not quite the U.S. Cavalry, but certainly the next best thing to relieve a beleaguered and outnumbered force.

The sound of sirens covered the soft shuffle of booted feet on the pavement behind him. As a result, it came as something of a surprise when the back of his head exploded with pain and a flash of colorless light, and he fell forward into blackness.

At the same time, Illya, untouched but harried along, found a narrow alleyway opening behind him. He rejected the obvious trap,

and continued following the shop fronts. The moment he had a few feet to spare, he broke to the freedom of the street and began a dash backwards the center of the fighting.

Even as he did so, the engine of the large van could be heard to rev up, and a quick tattoo of the horn apparently summoned the small army of toughs to return to their transport.

Just as the horn sounded, a flung crowbar caught Illya across the heels as he ran, and he sprawled face down towards the pavement. He rolled as he hit, feet together, ready to catch the first attacker as the four of them charged him.

Then one of them stumbled and fell, scrabbling helplessly. Another turned and yelled wordlessly to his companions as he saw a figure in the shadows of the alley. A second later his cry died in a gurgle as he staggered backward, clutching frantically at the slender hilt of a knife which had appeared suddenly springing from his chest.

Illya was on his feet again before the second man hit the ground. As he blocked the kick of one of the survivors, the figure detached itself from the shadows and drifted lazily forward towards the other one.

In five seconds of block and swing, block, kick and chop, Illya’s opponent was out for the count. Breathing heavily, he turned around.

His rescuer was leaning over two of the bodies, extracting a matched pair of beautifully delicate throwing knives, one from a chest, one from a back. Carefully he wiped each blade clean on the clothing of its victim, and with a flick of each wrist the knives seemed to vanish - probably into forearm sheaths, Illya decided.

He was tall and elegantly slim, as well as impeccably dressed. It almost seemed as if he must have passed by on pure chance, on his way home from the theater. The third thug resting on the pavement bore witness to his ability at hand-to-hand combat, but not a strand of his perfectly parted hair appeared to have been disturbed. As he straightened, he glanced at Illya with an almost foolishly innocent smile.

Then a suddenly rising roar of engines and screech of brakes announced the arrival of the rest of the police force. As Illya looked

in doubt at his impeccable rescuer, the latter spoke, and his voice was a regretful drawl. “So much for the evening’s entertainment. And it was just promising to become interesting, too.” He flashed a dazzling smile at Illya. “I hope you don’t mind my cutting into your fight, but I was beginning to feel rather left out of things, and I hate the thought of being a wallflower.”

He glanced down the street, to where half a dozen police cars were disgorging the reinforcements. “I see the groundskeepers have arrived. They will doubtless want to tidy up now, so there won’t be much left for us to do. Of course you will accept a ride back to your hotel. My car is just around the corner.”

Before he knew quite what was happening Illya found himself following a friendly pressure on his elbow away from the approaching police and down the alley. He cast a final look around the street, and observed that somehow the truck had disappeared with those of the gang who were still able to navigate. He took a quiet pleasure in the knowledge that several of the remainder were awaiting the cleanup squad through his own personal courtesies. As for Solo, he could always take care of himself, and this gentleman had several questions to answer.

The questions were still unformed when Illya found himself sitting in the lefthand seat of a long sleek Hirondel, of a design that had practically disappeared from the highways of Europe more than twenty years ago. The engine purred to life at the touch of its master, and the great car moved silently off through the streets of London.

Illya glanced sideways at the keen profile of the driver. A cigarette was canted carelessly between his lips, and the regular flash of streetlights cast his face into sharp outline. The Russian cleared his throat and started to ask the identity of his chauffeur.

Before he spoke, he was anticipated. “Actually,” the other said, “I can’t tell you very much. You’re after Johnnie Rainbow, of course. By this time, practically everyone knows that much. So am I. He must have an awful lot of loot stowed away from his unholy labors, and as an ardent Socialist I feel it should be redistributed. The most beautiful bundle of boodle in the civilized world is waiting to be put to charitable purposes, and I am heeding its call,” he added simply.

“For such a kind-hearted and thoughtful man, you wield a wicked knife,” Illya commented dryly.

“My only protection in a wicked world. And it’s knives, not knife. I can impale a flying champagne cork at twenty paces. It’s one of my celebrated party tricks. Actually it stems from a dislike of guns. Nasty, noisy, barbarous inventions of the devil.”

Illya never took his eyes off the man’s face. It was, a lean, smiling face, a face that should have belonged to a buccaneer, or Robin Hood. It definitely did not belong in the Twentieth Century; its owner seemed equally out of place. Gentlemen in evening dress did not ordinarily step out of dark alleys and impale jewel thieves with ivory-handled knives. There was definitely he decided, more to this than was readily apparent to the eye.

“But really, I hate to monopolize the conversation. What have you heard recently about the Rainbow gang?”

“Very little,” said Illya honestly. “They were supposed to have been responsible for the Rothschild gold robbery two weeks ago; they had a jewel robbery planned for tonight which seems to have gone astray somewhere. And they seem to have a most remarkable assortment of people looking for them for one reason or another.”

“You have no leads on his location, of course.”

“None. I don’t suppose…”

“Afraid not. But the more people searching, the more likely success. I take it you are interested in Johnnie only for his own charming self, and not for his fine collection of rare British cash?”

Illya nodded. “You are suggesting a pooling of information?”

“The idea had occurred to me.”

“It might be worked out. Unfortunately, at the moment, I fear neither of us has anything useful to the other.”

“Regrettably. However, I shall keep in touch. If I uncover anything you detective types might call a ‘clue,’ I’ll certainly ring you up and invite you over for a look at it.”

“And if we come up with anything?”

“I’ll know about it.” He glanced at Illya, and the flare of a passing streetlight struck a blue glint from his eyes. “There are times when I think half the population of this little island has a personal interest in finding Johnnie Rainbow. And it’s very hard to keep secrets in such a close-knit family. Now here’s your hotel - good night.”

And Illya was standing on the curb, looking off up the street after the sleek gray car until the burble of its exhaust had died away in the distance.

Chapter 6

How Napoleon Solo Declined an Honor, and Met an Exciting Young Lady

GRADUALLY NAPOLEON became aware that he ached in several places. His wrist hurt - he remembered having it nearly broken just a few minutes ago, or so it seemed. His head hurt - that he couldn't quite justify. It ached as if it had been hit very hard recently. And in addition to these complaints, he felt as if he had been thrown around rather roughly for several hours. His shoulders, back, hips and legs hurt too. He considered the combination of sensations for a while, and decided be didn't like it.

In fact, he decided, he was still being thrown around. He wasn't moving around himself, but large flat surfaces kept swinging around and hitting him, mostly in places where he was already bruised. He stuck out a hand and found something which was either a wall or a floor and groped around for a projection of any kind to hold on to.

He found nothing, but the feel of the cold slick metal helped bring his senses into focus. There was a loud roaring and rumbling which he was able to identify as the motor of a truck - a fairly large one, probably. He braced himself as well as he could on the slippery floor, and wrapped his arms protectively around his sore head.

The swaying of the truck still swung him from side to side, and wherever they were the pavement was not of the best - the floor still had an annoying tendency to drop away from under him and then leap up again just as he started to fall to meet it.

It was still dark, and he was attempting to read the luminous dial of his watch when he realized his eyes were still closed. He tried to open them, but it stayed dark. He concentrated until he was quite sure the eyelids were in a raised condition, and then looked around, trying to focus.

There was a little light after all - a vertical line of gray off at right angles to the directions he kept swaying. Since the swaying was an indication of turns, he reasoned that must be either the front or back of the truck - and since there was presumably a cab of some kind covering the front, it was probably the back. *In fact*, he decided as he finally pulled into full orientation, *that is the space between the two doors at the back*. *Also*, he added to himself, *it is daylight outside, which means I've been out for at least four hours*. He looked down at his watch again, and was relieved to find it glowing faintly in its accustomed place near the end of his arm. It looked like either two o'clock or ten minutes after twelve; his eyes still weren't focusing perfectly.

A quick check of his pocket showed his communicator missing - to be expected. Too many people knew what that little silver fountain pen was capable of - Section Five should start work on something new to hide the tiny long-distance radio in. A shoe-heel, for instance, or maybe a hollow tooth, depending on how miniaturization was progressing. His automatic was gone, of course - probably still lying there on the pavement of New Bond Street. He hoped somebody had picked it up; it would be a devil to clean if the dew got into it and rust pitting developed in the barrel. But his shoulder-rig was also missing. He hoped they were to together.

He checked his other concealed surprises - they were all in place. The little goodies that made each U.N.C.L.E. agent's suit into a walking arsenal were all present. As he contemplated the mental roll, his confidence returned. He could still blast his way out and make it back to London.

On the other hand, he might be almost anywhere. He had apparently been out of touch with reality for from eight to ten hours - that would be enough time for him to be halfway around the world. On the third hand, if he was halfway around the world and it was twelve-ten - or two - in England, it should be dark outside, so he was probably at least in Europe. But on the fourth hand, they could have reset his watch while he was unconscious, so it would be reading in local time. But that seemed uncommonly considerate for a bunch of kidnappers.

On the fifth hand, if he had been traveling in a truck for all - or even most - of those eight or ten hours, he could still be several hundred miles away. Or at least a few hundred, considering the size of Britain. On the sixth hand…

Napoleon was running out of hands, and the thought reminded him to look at his watch again. It was now either ten past one, or five minutes past two. He decided that, in view of the subjective time that had passed since he'd last looked at his watch, it was probably five minutes after two.

The truck bounced violently, and a wall he hadn't expected swung out of the darkness and dealt severely with a tender patch on the back of his head. Specks of light danced before his eyes for a moment, and he raised a shaking hand to steady himself again.

Judging from the vibration, they were going at a pretty good clip. It would be pointless to use one of the little 'skeleton keys' - the tiny lumps of thermite with a manually ignited fuse which would make slag of the sturdiest lock in seconds - to blow open the door of the van; probably be better to wait until they arrived wherever they were going, and the doors were opened. For one thing, he believed in letting the opposition do as much of the work as possible, and for another, he had several questions he wanted to ask somebody.

He settled back to rest and wait.

He was awakened again a short time later as the truck lurched violently to the left and began to bounce about as though it had just left the road. It went slower and slower, making many turns, and eventually lumbered to a stop. Napoleon rose stiffly to a crouch just inside the back doors.

Several seconds later there were clanking noises around the area of the latch, and he tensed his aching muscles for the leap. He remembered to squint his eyes just at the instant the doors swung open and a flood of daylight rushed in upon him.

There were two men, both with automatics, standing a few feet below him, on the ground. While their light-accustomed eyes peered into the darkness of the truck, Napoleon was gauging their distances

and angles from him. Before they had more than realized their prisoner was crouched just within the door instead of flopped against a wall, he had leaped out upon them, flailing arms and yelling.

But his bruised leg betrayed him as he landed, and buckled as he tried to sprint for cover. Before he could regain his balance the guns were leveled at him, and a patient voice was saying, “Back on your feet, now, and try not to fall over again.”

Napoleon slowly worked himself upright, and looked around at his captors. “What exactly is going on here?” he finally asked.

“You’ve been wanting to find out about Johnnie Rainbow,” said the patient one, “so Johnnie has decided to find out more about you. The difference is he knew where to find you.”

“Couldn’t he have found out without bringing me in for a personal interview?”

“Possibly he thought you could tell him more. I don’t make policy for the gang, I just do what I’m told. You should try it… you’ll find it makes life ever so much simpler. You can start by walking over there.”

“Over there” was the edge of a cliff, and somewhere far beyond the grassy knoll that led up to it Napoleon could hear and smell the sea. As he crossed the twenty-odd yards and climbed to the brink, he saw a wooden railing and a small platform which turned out to be the top of a flight of steps zigzagging down the face of the cliff to a narrow strip of pebbly beach some seventy-five or a hundred feet below him. A small motor launch bobbed on the water of the little cove, and figures were visible moving about the after deck.

Napoleon looked down at it and murmured, “A floating headquarters? Ingenious, but restrictive.”

“That’s not headquarters, you nit,” said the second man. “That’s a boat. Come on - down the stairs. They’re perfectly safe.”

“After you,” Napoleon said, stepping back politely.

“But we insist,” said the first. “After all, you’re the guest of honor. Remember, if we’d wanted to kill you we’ve had plenty of chances. If you’ll cooperate it’ll make things easier all around - I don’t especially

want to have to carry you down these steps, and you likely don't want another clout on the head."

Solo felt the back of his skull carefully, and agreed. He brought his hand down unexpectedly in a crisp chop across the wrist of the nearer man, and one gun flipped into the undergrowth. At the same time his opposite leg flashed up and caught the other man's gun hand in a demonstration of coordination that would win applause on any vaudeville stage. This audience seemed singularly displeased with it, however, and let out simultaneous howls of complaint. One was silenced an instant later as Napoleon's other hand, slightly bent and rigid, chopped through a short arc which ended on the side of the nearest neck.

Agony shot through his wrist as he connected, but the pain was compensated by the sight of half his opposition collapsed on the tough marsh grass.

The other half had jumped back, clutching at his own injured wrist, and Napoleon felt a moment of sympathy for him. But he was unarmed, and there was no telling how distant help was. He decided not to press the engagement.

Resolutely ignoring the twinges that shot up his legs and through his back, Solo broke and ran for cover. The truck stood empty and unguarded, but the first gunman, who no longer looked as patient as he had, stood between him and the open door of the cab. A motorized escape was out. Dodging and ducking, Solo was out of sight among the trees within five seconds.

There were shouts behind him, as the driver of the truck summoned help, probably from the boat. Napoleon hoped so; it would take them some time to climb those steps and to get their breath back afterwards. He glanced over his shoulder to establish the direction of the cliff, and hurried in the opposite direction.

They had turned off the main road - or at least a paved road - somewhere back this way. It couldn't be more than half a mile, he thought, judging from how long it had taken and how slowly they had been going. Half his muscles were stiffening up already, but with a combination of will power and fear of capture driving him, he was able to keep going.

He heard the pursuers long before he saw them, crashing through the brush and swearing. They were audible enough to give him both location and direction; as soon as both had been established he swung at right angles to their course, moved quietly some twenty feet, and stopped, listening.

They shouldn’t be making that much noise; they weren’t fools, by any means. More than likely, a few men were trying to beat him into the arms of the main group which was moving quietly in the opposite direction. He didn’t think they were clever enough to create a second-order deception, the main body making the most noise so he would think it was a trap. He took the situation at face value and doubled back, heading roughly towards the major source of racket.

As he approached, he became more cautious. They sounded only about fifty feet away now. He crouched low behind a bush and, parting the branches cautiously, peered out from his covert.

There they came - only two men, talking together as they came and brushing branches aside all about them, making quite a satisfactory racket. Napoleon pulled down into a tight little ball behind the bush, and tried to breathe as little as possible as they went by, less than fifteen feet away from him. After they passed, he began counting quietly to himself.

He counted off two hundred and fifty, and then looked around very slowly. There was no one else in sight. Very quietly and carefully he rose from his position of concealment and looked around again. Still no one. He took a cautious step, and then another. Eventually he was striding on through the woods, all pursuit left far behind him.

He became aware of the road shortly before he could see it, as the sound of a well-muffled engine and the unmistakable hiss of tires on pavement came to him. He hurried forward, his feet silent on the tufted grass, up a slight rise and past another line of bushes, in time to see the rear end of a big old battleship-gray Bentley disappearing around the next curve. Too bad he’d missed it - he needed a ride to the next town. No way of telling how far it was, or in which direction.

His main problem would be staying out of sight of the men hunting him while still remaining clearly visible to anyone coming along the road who might offer him a lift. He decided to compromise by

remaining in hiding under a convenient clump of something green until he heard another car coming.

It was several minutes before he did, and then it didn't sound quite like a car. It was loud, like a racing car, but had a peculiar deep-throated sound it took him a moment to identify. A motorcycle - and a big one, too.

There were still no signs of pursuit as he stepped onto the road. The cycle was approaching from his left, and he hurried across the pavement to meet it. The sound of the engine dropped a few notes as the bike slowed for the curve, then came booming into sight. Napoleon stepped out in front of it and waved his arms.

The bike slowed as it approached, and stopped with its engine muttering beside him. It was a big Royal Enfield - a quarter-ton of perfectly disciplined power. But the rider, resting lightly in the saddle like a sparrow on the back of a percheron, was a slender slip of a girl in white leathers. Her chestnut hair escaped from under her white helmet, and her eyes were hiding behind heavy goggles, but her smile was quick and bright.

"Need a ride?" she said.

"Just as far as the next town," said Napoleon. "Or the nearest telephone."

"That's where I'm going. Hop on."

He did, although with some caution. His thigh muscles objected to being swung over the rear half of the seat, and it took him a second or so to convince them of the necessity of cooperation. As he wriggled into a comfortable position, the girl spoke again.

"I don't know how familiar you are with motorcycles, so let me ask that you stay relaxed and let me do the steering. Don't try to lean into a curve when I do; just hold on to me and relax. Got that?"

"Right. I'll just be part of the bike."

"Fine. Set?"

"Set."

The engine roared up and the gearshift clicked into place, and the bike suddenly tried to leap out from under them. But Napoleon's

arms were locked around the girl's waist, and her grip on the handlebars was firm, and in a moment they were flying down the road. The thunder of the exhaust climbed the scale and then dropped as they shifted gears, then climbed and dropped again, and once more. Now, though the engine was muttering easily under them, they were whipping along the road with the trees flashing by on either side like fence-pickets. The afternoon sun slickered between the trees to their right, and the big machine purred along the narrow road like a racing cheetah, canting easily around corners and whirling up hills and down grades while Napoleon felt the tails of his coat trying to tear them selves loose in the windstream. He kept his head ducked behind the girl's as much as possible, letting her break the wind for him, but it was hard to hide all of himself behind her slender body.

The slipstream tore at his hair and his trousers slapped at his legs until they stung. The wind poured like jets of ice water into his dissolving eyes. They seemed to be outracing time itself as they flashed along the tree-bordered road, and the whole world was lost around them. Nothing existed outside the vibration of the machine gripped between his thighs, and the slim body his arms surrounded. His vision swam with tears, and his ears were filled with the roar of the wind, and there was nothing but himself and the girl, the cycle, and speed.

Chapter 7

How Napoleon Lay Low,
and a Little Old Lady Made Discreet inquiries

CONVERSATION WAS practically impossible for the next few minutes, but eventually there were houses around them and the cycle slowed to a careful twenty miles per hour. Napoleon blinked his eyes several times to clear them, and looked around at the small village they were in the midst of.

“Where are we?” he asked the girl.

“Baycombe,” she said.

“I mean generally. What county?”

She half turned her head in surprise. “You were lost! Devonshire.”

“Not lost, exactly. I’ll explain after I get to a phone.” She didn’t answer this time, but instead made a left and a right, and braked gently to a stop in front of a small cottage set a short way back from the side-street on which they found themselves. She braced the bike with both legs while Napoleon climbed off, then dismounted herself and set the stand.

Now that she was standing beside him, Napoleon was even more impressed with her handling of the big cycle. She scarcely came up to his chin, and she couldn’t weigh over a hundred pounds. He looked her up and down with some respect. There must be considerable strength concealed in that delicate body, to judge from the way she had flipped her cycle up onto its stand.

The object of his inspection, either unaware or ignoring it, loosened her chin strap and slipped off the helmet, shaking her coppery hair free as she did so. Then she lifted the goggles off, and rubbed the back of a gloved hand across her eyes.

“Let’s go inside,” she said. “Aunt Jane should have tea set out, and you can tell us what happened to you.”

They did, she did, and he did.

Aunt Jane was a tiny, spry little old lady who seemed to have been suspended in time somewhere near the turn of the century and brought forward as a living image of the Victorian - or perhaps Edwardian - lady. She seemed more like a picture-book grandmother than an aunt. The inside of the cottage was comfortably if sparsely furnished in a modern style which seemed quite out of place around her.

In the course of that cautious mutual interrogation which strangers share along with food, Napoleon found that the cottage belonged to the girl, whose name was Josephine, though she preferred to be called Joey. Aunt Jane was visiting from London for two weeks since the mid-May weather was much better in Devon than in the City.

Aunt Jane spoke approvingly of the morning's sermon, and paused to explain to Mr. Solo that although she was herself, of course, strictly C. of E., a personal friend had been saying Mass at the tiny Catholic church the village supported.

Napoleon smiled politely and nodded, half-listening as his mind chased over the possibilities of pursuit and the pressing necessity for re-establishing communications with the U.N.C.L.E. office in London, and, incidentally, with Illya. The tea was strong and sweet, and lent new strength to his aching muscles. Somewhere during the second cup, he suddenly realized what he must look like after rolling on the floor of a truck for several hours, running through the woods, and then riding on the back of a motorcycle for another indefinite period. He caught a glimpse of himself in the shiny side of the silver teapot and reacted with shock.

He set his empty cup down and cleared his throat. "Ah - please allow me to apologize for intruding upon you looking like this. I only just realized my appearance, and…"

"That's quite all right, Mr. Solo," said Aunt Jane. "You looked as if a good cup of tea would do you more good than soap and water. If you wish to refresh yourself, you will find the necessities at the back of the house, to the left of the kitchen."

He thanked her and rose, heading in the indicated direction. Some fifteen minutes later he returned, lacking only a shave and a fresh

shirt to feel perfectly presentable again. He had discovered a tear in his coat, and careful investigation had convinced him that his wrist had not been broken, or even cracked, though a nasty inflammation indicated a severe sprain that could impair his use of the hand for several days.

When he re-entered the front room, a stranger rose from the wicker chair to extend a hand. He was a short, roly-poly man with a round face, beaming with child like innocence above his clerical collar. Aunt Jane spoke from her chair.

“Father, this is Napoleon Solo, our guest this afternoon. Mister Solo, may I present Father John.”

They shook hands and Napoleon said, “I’m sorry for imposing on you like this, but could I use your telephone for a call to London? I could pay you for it, of course.”

“I’m sorry as well, Mr. Solo,” said Joey. “But we’re not on the telephone here. This is sort of my hideaway by the sea. There’s a public box down at the Rose and Crown, but that’s not open today.”

The little priest suddenly and unaccountably smiled at Aunt Jane, leaned forward, and spoke, in an almost childish treble. “I beg your pardon, Mister Solo, if I seem to be intruding. But if you are in any sort of difficulty, we would be only too pleased to be of any small service to you.”

Napoleon looked at the earnest, plump little priest and smiled. “Thank you, Father, but I’m afraid my problems are all entirely of a secular nature.”

“All the better. As one divorced from secular matters, perhaps I may be able to show them in another light.”

Aunt Jane said, “Perhaps Mr. Solo would rather not discuss personal matters before strangers, Father.”

“Well, it’s not at all a personal matter,” said Napoleon. “It’s… actually, it’s more or less a matter of business.” The temporization established, he hesitated, his mind racing.

The Rainbow Gang was based somewhere in this area. He couldn’t get in touch with Illya until tomorrow at the earliest. But the people who had kidnapped him knew he couldn’t have gotten too far,

and they would probably be looking around the area for him, so he would have to lie low while he was here. But it seemed a shame to be so close to Johnnie Rainbow's headquarters and not be out looking for it. Here was a chance to enlist some friendly natives - if he could trust them. Joey was unlikely to be a plant; he'd more or less found her at random on the road, unless Rainbow had planted her down the road a way to pick him up in case he got away and signaled her by radio… but then why hadn't she simply taken him back to them? Applying Occam's Razor, which translates into Modern English roughly as "Keep It Simple," she was probably just what she seemed to be, which was nice all the way around. And if she was all right, then Aunt Jane and Father John were also trustworthy, and might be able to help him.

This chain of thought occupied the time it took Napoleon's right hand to rise from his lap to the inner pocket of his coat, with a barely perceptible hesitation as he glanced thoughtfully at Joey. He brought out his wallet, and spoke again.

"Have you ever heard of the U.N.C.L.E.?" He spelled out the initials.

Joey looked blank. "The Uncle?" she said.

Aunt Jane's eyebrows rose. "No, Josephine. It's the United Network Command for Law Enforcement."

"For Law and Enforcement," corrected the mild voice of the plump priest. "I have heard something of this organization. Distantly related to Interpol, I believe." His wide gray eyes blinked repeatedly.

"Oh, no," said Aunt Jane. "Interpol is really only an information exchange. The United Network Command takes an active part in crime prevention on an international scale." She turned to Joey. "You see, dear, since crime in the modern world is unhampered by international boundaries, a sort of police force was needed which could also function supra-nationally. Where Interpol enables national police forces to pursue ordinary criminals who cross or whose influences extend over international boundaries, U.N.C.L.E. is capable of attacking crimes which involve whole nations. Isn't that more or less correct, Mr. Solo?"

Napoleon was caught somewhat off balance by this unexpected display of knowledge, and it took him a moment to recover. “Ah - as a matter of fact, that’s just about it. We’re similar to Interpol in that we aren’t specifically connected to any one country or group of countries; we’re supported by just about everyone except Red China and Albania. In fact, my partner is a Russian national.” Then he remembered, and flipped open his wallet, showing the gold card which identified him.

The little priest leaned forward to study the card, and nodded. “Baycombe seems an unlikely spot to attract an investigator of international crime.”

Aunt Jane said, “There are certain features in the area which could interest the criminals, however. It is quite peaceful and privacy is easily maintained. In addition, the sea offers a ready avenue for covert access.”

Joey looked at Napoleon, and her eyebrows rose. “You’re a detective?”

“More or less. Technically I handle the Enforcement part of the U.N.C.L.E. Right now I’m on the trail of a gentleman called Johnnie Rainbow.”

Both Aunt Jane and Father John registered surprise. She spoke first. “The Rainbow Gang? In this area? How marvelous!”

“What do you know about the Rainbow Gang?” Napoleon asked.

“Actually very little,” said the priest. “They’re supposed to have been behind the Royal Mail robbery in ‘63, and have been blamed for half the large jobs since.”

Napoleon cleared his throat, and put away his wallet. “You are aware that this is hardly supposed to be general knowledge,” he said.

“Of course, Mr. Solo,” said Aunt Jane sweetly. “Would you care for some more tea? You see, Father John and I share the hobby of criminology. There must be several hundred like us around England. We seldom get to participate in an actual investigation these days, but we keep up with current developments in the field. In the case of

Johnnie Rainbow, since his existence is officially denied, we take a special interest. Perhaps we would be able to help you in your work."

Napoleon looked at her doubtfully. "Well, I really don't…"

"What exactly has happened to you so far?" the priest asked. "How did you come to be picked up by the road? Had you escaped from kidnappers?"

"Ah, as a matter of fact I had," Napoleon said.

And over the next half hour he told his three unlikely allies the entire story from the time of their arrival in London four days earlier. When he finished, Father Brown nodded.

"That explains something I noticed earlier this afternoon. I don't believe I mentioned this before, but the local constable was approached by three men about two hours ago. They said an attempt had been made to rob them out on the Ilfracombe Road, and they described their assailant most carefully. When the constable mentioned it to me, I did not inquire of the description, but I should not be at all surprised if it were yours."

"But Scotland Yard will vouch for me."

"Indeed. But before you can establish your *bona fides*, you will have been detained long enough for the Rainbow Gang to find you again and do what they will."

"Perhaps," suggested Aunt Jane, "we could act as your agents while you remained in hiding here. Josephine, you have a spare bedroom, I believe."

Joey looked at her aunt strangely. "Of course I do. You're in it."

"Oh, I wouldn't want to displace anyone," Napoleon began, but Aunt Jane overrode him.

"Not at all. Josephine wouldn't dream of failing her duty as a hostess."

"I'm certain she wouldn't," said Napoleon. "But perhaps it might be more circumspect if I were to sleep on the sofa. I assure you I would be quite comfortable - as well as being in a better position to defend against any attempt at an invasion by the Rainbow Gang."

He had called her character correctly. The little old lady considered the suggestion a moment, then nodded. “Under the circumstances, Mr. Solo, I believe you are correct. The sofa would be best.” She turned to her friends. “Now, Father, what do you think of Mr. Solo’s story?”

“If they were indeed taking him to their headquarters, which seems quite possible, I would say it was on an island rather nearby.”

“Not across the Bristol Channel?” asked Napoleon.

“Not if the boat was as small as described,” said Aunt Jane. “Josephine, could you indicate on a map approximately where along the road you picked Mr. Solo up?”

“Of course. It was just about half a mile south of the Wuxton junction.”

“Fine. Would you find the large-scale map of the area, and a chart of the Channel? Thank you.”

The afternoon was spent in study of maps of land and sea. There were a number of islands ranging in size from moderate to infinitesimal, and mostly with some traces of habitation. They picked a radius of twenty miles and made a list of all the islands. Then they made a list of things Johnnie Rainbow’s headquarters could be identified by.

First, multiple communications with the land, probably showing radio antennae. Next, privacy for covert comings and goings. Among these would be not only boats but very likely a helicopter landing pad and possibly a space for a small seaplane, though not necessarily. Lastly, all changes would be fairly recent.

It was agreed that the next day Aunt Jane would begin checking on the ownership or occupancy of as many of the islands as possible, and Father John would place the call to London from the Rose and Crown. Napoleon instructed him carefully.

“The number is HOLborn 2600. When the call is connected you will hear a busy signal. Wait for thirty seconds, and then pronounce my name clearly twice. Then someone will come on the line. Tell them where I am and what happened. Tell them my communicator

was taken, and I need transportation back. They'll give you a message for me. Oh, and you might ask them to get in touch with the local arm of the law and clear me so I can walk the streets again."

Father John nodded, and departed.

"Now," said Aunt Jane, looking at Napoleon severely, "I see your coat has been a bit ripped at one side. If you will be so good as to take it off, I will mend it for you. Josephine, my sewing basket, please."

"We've found several islands that might interest you, Mr. Solo," Aunt Jane said the next afternoon. "I have a list here of those whose neighbors tend to make comments. My personal favorite is Donzerly, some twelve miles from here, eight from where you were found. There is an unused lighthouse perched on a spur of bare rock, but it has a floating pier and a paved area quite adequate for a small helicopter. The owner is a retired Naval officer, who purchased the light at an auction of Crown property some five years ago. He has maintained the foghorn, and it always sounds on bad nights. But the local fishermen seem to distrust him. He's added radar to the light's array of aerials, and has parties at the oddest times."

"Parties?" said Napoleon uncertainly.

"As far as anyone around here knows. He's antisocial enough to his neighbors, they say, but his friends fly in from the City at all hours."

"How do they know they're from London?"

"By the clothes. Oh yes, he also has two sturdy powerboats which come to our pier for supplies occasionally. Other than that, no one seems to know what goes on out there. Oh yes, there's been some notice of the amount of goods he seemed to be stowing away out there - all sorts of bundles and crates used to arrive on the island."

"The local fisherfolk seem to be immensely observant."

Aunt Jane smiled brightly. "All those who live close to nature are observant. And those who live close to the sea usually have telescopes near at hand."

There was a discreet tap at the front door, and Father John entered. “Your London office wishes me to in form you that Mister Kuryakin is also missing, as of quite early this morning, but, I believe they said, ‘Win one, lose one,’ or something like that. They will be sending a light plane for you tomorrow morning at ten.”

Chapter 8

How Illya Kuryakin Met and Spoke With a Remarkable Individual, and Was Allowed to Escape With His Life

MONTAGUE STREET WAS nearly deserted in the dimming light following sunset. Illya had spent a pleasant after noon at the British Museum pursuing interests which had no bearing on his current assignment, and had paused for a light meal at a Wimpy shop before walking the half-mile back to the U.N.C.L.E. office. As he stepped out into the dusk, the gaunt silhouettes of the new office buildings along Charing Cross caught his eye, black against the evening sky.

Perhaps he was comparatively lucky to see London two or three times a year - the old City was changing so rapidly now that people who had been away five years felt lost and out of place. The old pubs were being torn down or rebuilt into discotheques; the dark little shops which had carried on the traditions of generations were being replaced by shiny chrome steel and glass marketplaces full of bright trinkets made in Japan; and everywhere great glittering columns rose above the smoke-stained rooftops to catch the sunlight and to house London’s millions.

Half lost in thought, he crossed Russell Square and started up Woburn Place. Never so introspective as to lose track of his surroundings, he was fully aware when a taxi came out of Bernard Street and cruised slowly past him. It turned directly in front of him as he reached the entrance to Woburn Mews, and two men stepped out.

Without hesitation, they moved to either side of Illya. The Russian felt a familiar hard pressure against his side, and refrained from objecting - it could be a pipestem but it wasn’t worth the risk to find out.

A low voice on the same side said, “Just step right in, please.”

It seemed an innocent enough request - hardly worth arguing about. Illya stepped inside, and a moment later was sitting between the two men. A third was driving; he backed neatly out and turned south. As he did so, the man to Illya's right squirmed around in the seat, reaching for an inner pocket, and produced a black silk kerchief. In thirty seconds Illya was quite effectively blindfolded.

The ride lasted about half an hour, with frequent turns, until even Illya's excellent sense of direction was completely confused. At one point, the taxi seemed to be backing up for an indefinite distance, then made a pair of canceling turns. This was followed by a long straight stretch where their speed increased considerably.

When they finally stopped and the noise of the engine died away, Illya could hear crickets. The door was opened and he felt a hand on each elbow guiding him. A voice at his ear said, "This way. The gravel is tricky."

Their feet crunched on the broken rock of possibly a driveway, then sank slightly into a cushion of grass. In another ten paces a concrete walk was beneath them. The voice said, "Easy now. Up four steps," and the hands at his elbows indicated a turn as they mounted.

Up eight more steps and another turn, and Illya could half sense a solid bulk before them. The faint reverberations of their footsteps gave an impression of a wall - probably the front of a house. They stopped, and several seconds later a soft click and a breath of cool air indicated that a door had opened. They stepped into a large silence, cushioned with a deep carpet, and permeated with the sweet dark smell of old elegance and good taste.

But his guides didn't stop to enjoy the atmosphere. They turned him to the left again, off the carpet onto a hardwood floor, through another door, around some corners and down a long echoing corridor. At last they stopped, and one of them knocked - a deep booming note like a log drum. There was a buzz as an electric latch operated, and a slight draught told Illya the door had opened. They stepped forward onto another carpet, and the blindfold was removed.

The room was just as Illya's imagination had pictured it - the walls were paneled and the ceiling was high. Glass-fronted bookcases

stood tall and contemplative in corners. Armorial bearings sparkled on the walls, and leaded French doors gave onto a flawless green lawn. Comfortable chairs were set about, with a great solid desk at their focal point.

Behind the desk sat a man. Not a particularly impressive man at first glance, with a receding hairline, a broad open face decorated with a military moustache, and a tendency towards jowliness. Not particularly impressive, that is, unless you considered his eyes, which had the color and quality of fine-grade steel. He sat crisply erect behind the desk, and his gaze was fixed on Illya as the Russian looked around the room, noting and cataloguing. When at last their eyes met, he spoke.

“Illya Kuryakin, of the U.N.C.L.E.,” he said, as if inscribing a tag for an exhibit.

Illya gave him a slight nod of acknowledgment, and said, “And you must be Johnnie Rainbow.”

Unexpectedly his host smiled. “My *nom de guerre*. Perhaps too melodramatic, but practical. It gives me an aura of the elusive, the imaginary, and the harmless - valuable first impressions in my business.”

“And your business is…?”

“Selling advice and ideas, Mr. Kuryakin. And occasionally implementing ideas myself. I am akin to a theatrical producer in many respects.”

“Your shows have short runs.”

“But highly successful, both critically and at the cash box. And what more can an artist ask?”

Illya nodded. “I have heard nothing but praise for the recent gold robbery - except from Rothschild’s.”

“Admittedly prejudiced critics. But Mr. Kuryakin, I did not have you brought here to discuss the art of robbery. You and your partner have been seeking me with admirable fortitude for the last few days, and have attracted the attention of a great number of people. During this time I found out quite a bit about you and your organization, the U.N.C.L.E. And two days ago I decided to meet you.”

“So you picked up my partner at the recent entertainment in New Bond Street and hustled him across England, only to see him avoid the engagement.”

“In point of fact, this was one of the matters I wished lo bring up,” said Johnnie Rainbow. He slid open a desk drawer and rummaged about in it. “Please accept these as tokens of my unwillingness to cause you unnecessary hardship.”

He brought up from the drawer and laid on the desktop a familiar silvery cylinder, and a large black automatic pistol, still in its shoulder holster. The butt of the automatic had a white plastic initial “S” inlaid.

“Your partner’s pistol and his communicating device. You will be allowed to take them with you when you leave, and return them to him when he returns to London tomorrow afternoon.”

“I thank you on his behalf,” Illya said uneasily. “But you could have had a messenger drop them by.”

“I could have - and would, if I had no further interest in you or your partner. But I have found myself in an interesting position, and wish to discuss it with you.”

“I’m flattered.”

“Don’t be. I greatly prefer to keep my own counsel. But I have an offer to make you, and you cannot consider it adequately until you have a complete grasp of the background.”

“You understand that I cannot speak for any of the national agencies of law enforcement.”

“Of course. Your powers are restricted by your nature. Local authorities generally cooperate with you, but cannot be forced to do so. You cannot officially arrest any one, but you can take them into custody and have them bound over for arraignment by governmentally constituted tribunals. I am also aware that you seldom deal with individual criminals - that you, personally, feel that your current assignment is somewhat beneath you.”

Illya’s face scarcely betrayed a fraction of his surprise, but Rainbow caught the flicker and smiled. “I am neither a mind-reader nor a magician, Mr. Kuryakin - merely an adept observer. But hear

me out, and you should be able to guess my offer before I have stated it specifically."

The Russian agent settled back in the chair and crossed his legs as Johnnie Rainbow began.

"Over a year ago I was first contacted by representatives of an organization which I have reason to believe is not unknown to you - their acronym is Thrush. They openly admire my work, my organizational ability, my modest talent for timing. They told me something of their work, and I will admit to being most intrigued. And they offered me a position in their hierarchy.

"Their offer was moderately attractive, and I gave it some thought before rejecting it. My position here is, I feel, an enviable one. I am effectively at the top of my profession, popular, sought-after, respected. I also wield a fair amount of power, and am completely autonomous in my operations. If I were to agree to join Thrush, I would lose a good deal of the independence of action, which is very precious to me.

"I told their representative my decision, he increased their offer. At this moment, were I to accept, I would be directly in line for what they call their Supreme Council. But I do not plan to accept.

"There are many things about Thrush of which I do not approve. They suffer from the flaw of many large corporations, which is a lack of any human qualities in their relations with others. Everything is done strictly by orders. There seems to be no room for individual initiative."

Illya cleared his throat. "This is only true to a certain extent," he said. "In many Satraps, individuality is very highly prized - at least, by those in charge."

Rainbow shook his bead. "I know only the few men I have seen. They act very strangely, and seem incapable of making decisions on their own." He pondered a moment. "They seem very foreign.

"I don't think of myself as a prejudiced man, Mr. Kuryakin. But I do consider myself an Englishman first and foremost. The Crown was my only parent, from an orphanage through the Royal Army. Now,

these Thrush people have been making noises about taking over everything, unifying the whole world under their own control. And I will not be a part of such a scheme. I fought against Hitler - working my way up through the ranks as an officer and a gentleman preventing other people from getting the whole world under their thumbs."

"The Army no longer seems to hold any warm feelings for you," Illya pointed out.

Rainbow grimaced slightly. "Perhaps not. I made a mistake - and I was quite justly punished for it. I defaulted in a position of responsibility. It was my only error in nineteen years of faithful service. I have never since proved false to an oath given.

"But Thrush has not proven easy to refuse. In the last several months they have been presenting me with samples of their technology for use in my own operations -"

"Those gas guns you used in the Rothschild job?"

"Those were part of a recent shipment, yes. But they have given me as well many items of hardware which I have as yet found no use for. I do not wish to become obligated to these men whom I distrust, yet their importunity is becoming annoying. They have become increasingly insistent on my agreeing to work with - or for - them, and refuse to entertain the thought that I sincerely might not wish to.

"My true headquarters is still maintained in utmost secrecy - this lovely manor house is only on loan for a short period for various conferences concerning an operation of great complexity and commensurate reward. So far, Thrush is only able to contact me by devious channels, which is the way it will remain."

Rainbow leaned back in his chair and reached for a cigar. He extended the humidor towards Illya, who shook his head politely, then clipped one end neatly, inserted it beneath his moustache, and ignited the other end. When a blue haze had formed around his head, and silence had filled the room for a good two minutes, he spoke again.

"This, then, is my position. I am being wooed by this distasteful but stubborn group, Thrush. You have come here after me, I believe, but

you maintain a constant interest in Thrush. I would like to suggest that you go after the larger game, and leave me alone."

Illya nodded. "I understand your point of view," he said. "But you admit to some contact with these recruiters - could you not give us perhaps some more material assistance, such as names, addresses, descriptions?"

Rainbow removed his cigar and looked at Illya. "Perhaps it is not so in Russia or the United States, but here there are still remnants of what used to be referred to as 'honor.' I will not betray the trust even of those whom I personally dislike."

"Trust needs to be mutual. Do you think you can rust Thrush not to destroy you if you continue to refuse them?"

"I have seen nothing to indicate they are less than honorable. And allow me to say immodestly that I may take a great deal of destroying."

"Thrush is capable of directing more effort than you might believe possible towards the destruction of an individual."

"Perhaps. How is it that Mr. Solo and yourself have escaped their attentions all this time? Luck?"

A bit of a smile creased the Russian's dour face. "It helps. But there are many factors which contribute to our continued survival. You will understand if I don't explain them."

"Of course, of course. The information would do me no good, and could conceivably lessen your chances. But to return to my point - you have before you on the desk your partner's hardware. He himself will be returning to you tomorrow around noon, unharmed, as he would have been even had he not escaped when he did. Please convey to him my apologies for the rough treatment which he received, and add that I hope our next meeting will be under more amicable conditions." Rainbow leaned forward again and touched a button on the desk.

A moment later, Illya felt rather than heard the door open behind him, and his host said, "Return Mr. Kuryakin to his hotel, please, and give him back his gun and radio along with those on my desk when you arrive." His eyes focused back on Illya's face, and he said, "You

will have to be blindfolded again, Mr. Kuryakin. I hope you won't mind, but it is quite unavoidable under the circumstances."

And the interview was at an end.

Section III

“Add Another Hue Unto The Rainbow”

Chapter 9

How Napoleon and Illya Met an Old Old Gentleman, and Had Several Obvious Things Pointed Out to Them

THE NEXT DAY WAS Tuesday, and Napoleon sat across a restaurant table from Illya exchanging stories.

“There’s no possibility of finding the place again?”

The Russian shook his head. “They drove a different route on the return trip. Each way took about thirty minutes, but I know they spent some of that time doubling back. It was quite a professional job.”

“What about the cab number?”

“I checked it out as soon as I returned. There is such a company, and they have a cab with that number - but it was working steadily all evening. I was riding in a clever forgery.”

Solo nodded. “What was your impression of Rainbow? Did I miss much by declining his invitation?”

“Not that much. He’s an interesting individual. I would say he is probably quite serious about not wanting any part of Thrush; he has found a place in the world and is quite satisfied with it.”

“Would he be likely to help us against Thrush?

Illya sipped at his cup of strong black tea before answering. “Not unless something very large happened to change his mind. He can be just as stubborn to us as he’s being to them. If they were to set out actively, specifically and obviously to destroy him, then he might be persuaded to give evidence against them. If he lived long enough after the evil bird fixed its sights on him. On the other hand, I can think of few people I would give better odds for surviving under such circumstances.

“And what did you learn from your peaceful sojourn in the country?”

Napoleon smiled. “I learned that a hundred-pound girl can handle a five-hundred-pound motorcycle as well as I can handle a skiff. I learned never to underestimate the abilities of little old ladies or plump priests. And I learned that Johnnie Rainbow’s center of operations stands a fairly good chance of being inside a lighthouse on a little lump of rock called Donzerly.”

“Not an unprofitable weekend. How much more were you able to find out about this Donzerly?”

“Not an awful lot. According to the files at the Admiralty, the light was decommissioned about six years ago. This retired Naval officer picked it up at an auction of Crown property for a song, plus tax, and has decided to maintain and modernize it. Apparently there has been quite a bit of action around the light for the past five years, but no one seems to know exactly what’s going on there. No one in any official capacity has set foot on Donzerly since the deed was signed over.”

“And the mysterious retired Naval officer?”

“Not mysterious at all. Commander Horatio Dascoyn. Not a brilliant career, but an unblemished one. Every day of his life is on record, and there isn’t a hint anywhere to connect him with anything more criminal than a few dust-ups in foreign ports when he was young. Absolutely unimpeachable, and totally above suspicion.”

“Which in itself is highly suspicious,” said Illya, and Napoleon nodded.

“My thought precisely. I put the local Section Three on it. They haven’t found anything yet, but if there’s anything there, they will.”

“Even if it takes them six months. Did you get anything we can use right now?”

This time Napoleon used his drink to fill a few seconds of silence while he thought. “Well, not exactly. All I got was a sort of suggestion. It’s not a lead, and it’s not a clue, and it has no direct bearing on our assignment - but right now it’s the only thing we’ve got until some thing turns up on Dascoyn.”

“If you wanted to capture my interest, you have succeeded. What is this thing - the product of a Ouija board? Or a cryptic message you

found in a bottle?”

“Neither. I mentioned already that both Aunt Jane and Father John claimed the hobby of criminology. They gave me the name and address of a man whom they seem to consider the leader of their little clique, and suggested we talk to him.”

Illya gave Napoleon a look that implied a straitjacket and probably a padded cell. “A hobbyist?” he said unbelievingly. “An amateur detective of some kind? What on earth could you hope to find out from an armchair expert? He probably follows all the crime stories in the newspapers and pastes them in scrapbooks, with little notations on theories and resolutions. With the resources of Scotland Yard, part of MI-5, and all of U.N.C.L.E., you want to seek the advice of some utterly incompetent little man who has probably never seen an actual crime outside a newspaper photograph?”

Napoleon raised a hand to shorten his partner’s out burst. “He may be, or he may not,” he said. “Talking with a little old lady and an equally unprepossessing priest, I gained quite a respect for their minds and abilities, as I believe I said only recently. They seemed to admire this man tremendously, and because of this I am willing at least to talk to him. You may either come along or pursue your interests here in the city while I go alone.”

“Where? And what do you know about him? What does he do for a living? What’s his name, and what are his qualifications?”

“Actually I know very little. He’s very old, apparently - somewhere around a hundred years old, according to Father John. Aunt Jane said he was once a detective, though I imagine most of our modem techniques would be beyond him by this point. Outside of that, all I know is that he is long retired, and keeps bees on his little Sussex farm. And his name is William Escott. I’ll be going down to see him tomorrow afternoon.”

Illya sighed. “I may as well come along. It might be interesting, if not educational.”

It was three o’clock on a still May afternoon when two casually dressed individuals descended from the second passenger car of a

little local train at the station of a sleepy Sussex town. One was tall, long-jawed, and obviously American. The other was square-faced and blond, wearing American clothes but of less certain nationality. They conversed together in low tones, and though the usual station loungers could have taken oath that neither of them had ever been in the village before, both strode directly up High Street without pausing to ask for directions.

They walked completely through the village and out the other side where High Street narrowed again to a two-laned strip of pavement cracked with heavy use. The shriek of the train announcing its departure from the station came faintly to them across the somnolent haze of the afternoon.

They had walked perhaps half a mile beyond the last houses of the village before Napoleon turned left into a narrow dirt lane that wound off under the branches of great antediluvian oak. The only sounds that reached them now were the whispers of a fitful breeze stirring the leaves nearby and the distant drone of insects. The harsher buzz of a light plane somewhere far away in the sky mingled with the soft undercurrent of sound to give an impression to city-bred ears of total silence.

Weeds stood cockily down the center of the road between parallel ruts, and the most observant eye would detect no trace of the oil stains that mark a road frequented by motor vehicles. They seemed to have stepped from the train into a village of 1900, and to have walked from there to a time a hundred years earlier. A feeling of peace, of separation from the Twentieth Century, soaked slowly into them with the heat from the haze-shrouded golden sun. A startled rabbit leaped from the cover of a clump of grass and bolted across the roadway - a flicker of gray fur and a rustling and then stillness again.

The road wound around the foot of a low gentle hill, and dipped into a green valley. They stopped at the top of the grade and looked ahead of them. A small stream sparkled amid rush-crowded banks, and a grove of ash trees stood tall and graceful beside a small thatch-roofed cottage. Behind the cottage ranks of white boxes perched on low tables, grass standing proud and uncut about them.

Now the two visitors became aware of numbers of bees, humming like a chorus, darting around them.

Illya finally broke the silence that had accompanied them since passing the edge of town. “Is this the place?” His voice was almost unconsciously lowered to match the hush of the little valley.

Napoleon nodded, and started on down the lane. A path wound off it to the door of the cottage, and ended where an ancient thorn bush stood beside the slab of rock that served as a stoop. Napoleon knocked at the heavy dark wooden door, and the sound seemed to echo inside the house for several seconds before it died away and was replaced by the sound of shuffling footsteps.

The door swung inward, and an aged face peered out at them.

“William Escott?” Napoleon inquired.

“At your service,” said a whispery voice, which still held overtones of a former strength. “Come in, come in.”

They followed him into the dim, cool interior of the cottage, and found chairs set about a fireplace. The room was a shambles. Books were stacked on tables and chairs, a stench of sulfur dioxide tinged the air from an ancient fractionating column visible on the kitchen sink, a few letters were pinned to the top of the mantel piece with an opened jackknife, a violin case stood in a corner by the most comfortable chair, and various unidentifiable objects stood and lay about the cozy little room.

When they were seated, Escott spent several seconds studying them both intently while they returned his scrutiny. They saw a very old man, not bent with age but standing as straight as a soldier, whose hawklike eye had not been clouded with the passage of time, and whose face retained the keenness that must once have been his. His bright gaze darted from one to the other of his guests as his bees darted from flower to flower. At last he spoke, directly to Napoleon.

“You have recently been in Devonshire, where you had a misfortune of some kind. You spent a short time there, and returned to London… yesterday. You came from London today to see me. Why?”

Taken off balance by the sudden question, Solo said, “That’s very good. How do you do it?”

“From the looks of mudstains on your coat, I should imagine,” Illya murmured.

“But I had it cleaned and pressed as soon as I got back.”

Escott chuckled, a surprisingly deep rich sound. “Precisely how I placed you in London yesterday.” He pointed to Napoleon’s trouser cuff. “That particular type of crease is affected by a chain of dry cleaning establishments in London, and while the garment has obviously scarcely been worn a day since the pressing, the cloth lacks the slightly matted appearance of moderately long storage. I decided it was pressed yesterday. The slight tear in your coat indicates the misfortune, but the fact that it is only stitched up, not fully repaired, also indicates that it was quite recent. Presumably you would have had the damage taken care of on your return to London unless you only had a day - enough time for a dry-cleaning but not enough for invisible reweaving.”

“Oh,” said Napoleon inadequately. “How did you decide it was in Devonshire?”

“Come now. If I gave away everything I should soon lose my value. But you still have not stated your business with me. You are not reporters come for an interview on the latest large robbery. You are not from the Yard; neither of you is English.” He was mumbling to himself now, having apparently lost the thread of the conversation. “Besides, the Yard scorns my advice as they have always done. Yet you are connected in some way with law enforcement. These robberies are of no interest to Interpol. The only other organization that would mix nationalities in a team would be the U.N.C.L.E…”

His voice rose again, leaving him apparently unaware of having spoken his thoughts. “You are from the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement. This means that my theory as to the disposal of the loot was essentially correct - it was sent abroad by diplomatic carrier.”

Illya’s mouth was slightly open in amazement, but only for a few seconds. Napoleon stepped into the moment’s silence. “Mr. Escott, my name is Napoleon Solo, and this is my partner, Illya Kuryakin. As

you have surmised, we are indeed from the U.N.C.L.E., and we are here in regard to the Royal Mail robbery and the recent Rothschild gold robbery."

"In other words, the Rainbow Gang." The old man leaned forward and plucked a pipe from the table. While the effects of his words filtered through the room, he filled, packed and ignited it.

This time Illya recovered first. "You were recommended to us by a friend of Mr. Solo's who held a very high opinion of your abilities. Your parlor tricks are most impressive, but I frankly doubt…"

"You are grasping at straws, in other words." The late afternoon sunlight came straight in through a dusty window and spotlighted his face against the dimness of the room as he leaned forward. "Pray continue. I am so seldom consulted these days that I welcome recognition even in desperation. Tell me the exact nature of your interests - spare no detail. I am no longer able to conduct my investigations in person, but my mind remains keen."

Napoleon and Illya looked at each other, and the latter shrugged slightly and the former nodded, and together they began with the data they had collected in the last few days. Escott listened attentively, nodding occasionally, through the entire recital, then asked a few questions, touching on points he felt had been inadequately covered. During this cross-examination the sun had set, and oil lamps were lit when Napoleon's pocket transceiver twittered, and he excused himself to answer it.

"Solo here."

"Section Two, London. There's to be an airdrop of assorted hardware from Thrush to Rainbow tomorrow night. Sources are unable to establish location. We'll keep you informed. London out."

Napoleon folded his transceiver and replaced it in his pocket with a thoughtful expression. Illya finished clearing up a detail about the house - or more specifically the room - in which he bad met Johnnie Rainbow, and looked up.

"Bad news from home?" Lie asked.

"Not good. The London office got word of a delivery of devilish devices to Johnnie sometime tomorrow night - they don't know when

and they don’t know where. All they know is it’s to be an airdrop.”

“Time will be between one and three A.M., the morning of the 19th. The location will probably be in the southern part of England - the terrain is better. The target will probably be near something easily identifiable on radar, but far from major habitation.” The old man’s voice was calm.

There was silence for several seconds. Illya cut it short with one word: “Stonehenge.”

“Quite likely,” said Escott.

“Among the papers on Rainbow’s desk there were several maps, including one of Stonehenge. It was mostly covered, but I saw the corner with the name. I think it’s worth a try.”

“So do I.” Solo turned to Escott. “I doubt if there will be another train out of here tonight, but we’ll leave for wherever Stonehenge is first thing in the morning. Do you have enough data to start formulating a theory?”

“I never theorize. I merely examine, correlate and reason. But I have enough data to begin work. If you could give me a list of the maps you saw on Rainbow’s desk it could help.”

“I think I can remember most of them. I was mentally recording as much as I could in the short time was there.”

“Capital. An excellent habit.”

Napoleon interrupted one more time. “What time did you say it would be?”

“Between one and three in the morning. The moon is just past its first quarter, and will set about one A.M. If the airbase is nearby, the drop will arrive shortly after moonset. If they are as far away as France, they may take two hours to make the journey each way.”

“But… no later than three?”

Escott sighed. “Dawn comes before five A.M. They would want to be safely back at their base by that time.”

“Oh, of course,” said Napoleon. “That’s really quite elementary.”

Escott winced visibly and returned to Illya.

Chapter 10

How the Heel Stone Proved an Achilles Heel, and Napoleon Solo Crossed Salisbury Plain on a Bicycle

A SLIGHT OVERCAST dimmed the stars, and the moon, as advertised, had disappeared shortly after midnight. The silence of the night was unbroken, and in the faint glow from the sky tall black shapes reared in ancient stillness.

The eldritch sarcens and cromlechs of Stonehenge stood patiently against the night sky, hinting at mysteries older than civilization, waiting for the world to bring them to sunlight again.

Napoleon and Illya sat in moderate comfort in hiding between two great standing stones. They had come with great stealth as soon as darkness was fully upon the face of the land, and had waited many hours since then. About two o'clock they became aware of surreptitious noises, as of several men attempting to move quietly and mostly succeeding. Because of the possibility of the expected aircraft using infrared to locate its target, the U.N.C.L.E. agents did not have similar equipment - an IR floodlight shows up quite as clearly on the enemy's scope as a real one to the naked eye. Illya was quietly regretting the lack of opportunity to return to London and pick up a light-amplifier, which operated undetectably. But at the time, Stonehenge had seemed only the most likely of several possible locations, and the chance of it paying off had not been worth the extra effort, Now it was about to, and they had only minimal gear themselves.

Their job would be to interfere with the airdrop such an extent that they could capture the prize - whatever it was. Casualties or prisoners from the other side didn't matter at this point. It was a simple matter of hijacking the cargo.

Straining their vision across the darkness, Napoleon and Illya watched while a few small pieces of equipment were unpacked and

adjusted - apparently signals for the expected aircraft. And shortly before three o’clock it came.

The distant drone of an engine gradually grew to point where the hearing could take conscious notice it, and with a bit of cautious whispering and pointing the two U.N.C.L.E. agents were able to pick it through a break in the clouds.

Across the circle of stone, a light flashed three times, casting deep featureless shadows across the faces of the stones. The plane gave no sign, high above them, as it approached, but continued on its course directly over the monument. Then, just as it passed head, something small and white appeared far below it faintly against the sky. It swayed and grew slowly, drifting towards them. It resolved gradually into a parachute with a crate of some kind swinging beneath it.

It made an audible landing just to the west of the circle, and four men detached themselves from the shadows and ran across the grass towards it.

In seconds they had surrounded the case, which was perhaps three feet on a side. Apparently secure in the belief of solitude, they were caught quite unprepared when a sharp voice out of the darkness said, “All right - hold very still and raise your hands. All of you.” At the same moment a powerful battery-operated floodlight pinned them to the spot. The four men stood frozen in their various positions, harshly lit against the blackness of the night.

Then, as though directed by a single control, all four of them leaped away into the darkness in different directions. Napoleon’s first shot snapped through the space where one of them had been standing, and an instant later muzzle flashes flickered from the shadows. Illya swept the light across the plain, but no heads were to be seen above the grass. As two slugs whipped past him, he killed the light and dived for cover behind the nearest stone himself.

He wriggled over to Napoleon for a fast conference. In terse whispers, punctuated by occasional gunshots, they worked out a plan of action.

A few seconds later the floodlight appeared again, weaving and bobbing, picking out the hiding men. As the light rose higher and

higher from the ground it swung about, bathing the short scrub grass in light. The Rainbow men stayed concealed, as Napoleon's sights traversed the area.

At the same time, Illya, having thrown the cord of the floodlight over the top of a lintle-stone so it dangled in the air, and hauled it up to perhaps twelve feet from the ground, was running silently in the opposite direction. Just beyond the Heel Stone to the east was a road, and just across the road their little two-seater was concealed. While Napoleon kept the opposing team under control, he could zip around among them, pick up the box and remove it.

He whipped the camouflage blanket away, vaulted into the seat and hit the starter. The engine raced, and rear wheels threw clouds of dirt as they tore at the ground for traction. In seconds he was around the end of the fence and bounding over the tussocky grass, his headlights stabbing at the sky and sweeping the ground. The dangling floodlight picked out the crate he was after, and he gunned the engine in second gear, hoping the defenders would be able to keep out of his way.

The car jerked to a halt between the light and the box. Illya leaped out the near side and hoisted the case. Three shots whipped by him, and a short burst from somewhere below the light clipped the tops of the grass blades.

The case was large enough to be clumsy, but weighed no more than fifty pounds. Illya crouched, gripped fingers under the edge, and lifted. For a moment he was silhouetted against the harsh floodlight, and the car lurched slightly as he dropped the case into the passenger seat. He took off again, swinging right, as a fusillade went off behind him and to his left. As he made a long U-turn, headlights out, the communicator in his pocket twittered. Steering one-handed, he fished it out and flipped it open. Napoleon's voice whispered in his ear.

"Illya - I've been pinned down by the four of them while you were loading up. I can hole up where I am, but you can't get in to me. Get that box somewhere safe, and I'll call for help."

The Russian clicked an acknowledgment. Solo could take care of himself, as had been noted, and under the circumstances the box of

Thrush’s latest developments was worth as much as a chance on his life.

A few slugs sang by like mosquitoes as Illya dropped into top gear, fighting the steering wheel and forcing the bucking car back towards the road.

Napoleon, at the same time, crouched behind a stone and stuffed cartridges into his long magazine. There seemed to be more than four men out there now - perhaps there had been another crew with a truck some where nearby. He had seen Illya go bounding away over the plain with the box in the lefthand seat, and there had been no concerted effort to chase him.

He glanced at his watch. The glowing hands read shortly past three. It would be dawn in another hour and a half, and darkness would no longer hide him. His last act before escaping from his former hiding place had been to disconnect the lamp and deactivate the battery; that was one weapon they wouldn’t be using against him. He finished reloading his twenty-shot magazine and settled down to wait.

Some ninety minutes later Napoleon crouched once again behind a stone - the Heel Stone, the same that Illya had sprinted past on his way to the car. During the last hour and more, he had been harried and chivvied from place to place, dodging from one stone to another in an effort to avoid encirclement, retreating slightly. And now he was at the easternmost stone in the whole monument - a great rough boulder perhaps ten feet wide and twenty high, jutting up from the Wiltshire grass. A wide stretch of open space lay between him and the edge of the monument.

The stones were beginning to show lighter against the western sky, now, and the last of the stars were swallowed in a light mist which formed in the air. The Rainbow men - those who were left - could not rush him across the open ground, but he could not escape from the sanctuary of the standing stone. If he could only hold them off for a while longer…

Then he felt a warmth on the back of his neck, and turned his head, shading his eyes with the palm of a chilly hand. The sun had

just cleared the horizon, and the mist was burning away. The golden rays were suddenly dazzling against the last wisps of night, and he looked down.

He holstered his automatic again as the last of the mist faded, and began to run. He ran low, half-bent among the tufts of grass, directly toward the rising sun. He heard a few shots from behind him, and dodged slightly. The rising sun, almost directly behind the Heel Stone, blinded his pursuers and guided him to escape by its shadows.

Ten minutes later Napoleon rose from a crouch in the grass to check his backtrail visually. There was no sign of pursuit. Gradually he stood upright and looked all about him in the cold, wet morning air. He was alone. There was only a farmhouse, perhaps half a mile away, where no light showed to indicate a wakeful inhabitant.

He started towards it, slogging through the dew-heavy grass. And thirty seconds later something cracked through the air beside his head like the tail of a whip. He broke into a run, leaping and dodging, heading towards the distant farmhouse, as the sound of the shot reached him, flat and far away across the moors.

Into the farmyard he staggered, winded from the run. He may have lost them, or they may have been hurrying along behind. He glanced at the shuttered windows of the sleeping farmhouse, and decided against involving the citizenry. Around the far side of the house he found a bicycle leaning against a wall. He fumbled in his pockets for a pen and paper, and scribbled a note. *Am borrowing your bicycle; it will be returned. Here's something for your trouble*. He fastened it to a five-pound note and tacked it to the wall.

Then he straightened the bike silently, straddled it, and spun away, wobbling slightly, down the dirt road that led from the farmer's gate. Unless his pursuit had been able to bring a vehicle along with them in that long chase over the plain, he could now outdistance them with ease. The road was reasonably level, and merged with a paved thoroughfare after a mile or so, heading south.

At the junction, wet and cold, Napoleon surveyed the road and tried to orient himself. He was now, uh, southeast of Stonehenge.

The nearest large town was Shaftesbury, which would be… ah… to his right. Probably.

He regretted having left the map of the area in the car. He turned to the right, consciously remembering to stay in the left lane, and pedaled away into the lonely morning.

The sun warmed his back as he pumped along down the road, and the instinctive equilibrium a cyclist develops came back to him. One car passed him from behind as he pedaled down the seven or so miles into Shaftesbury, and it came upon him so suddenly he almost veered off the road and into the ditch. It zoomed past, and the stench of its exhaust faded quickly.

At last the outskirts of the town were about him, and he left the bike on the steps of the local police station and wandered on afoot. He found a small park and settled down on a dew-spangled bench, dredged out his communicator, and called for Illya.

With no answer on the local channel, he called for the London relay, and signaled again. After several seconds the Russian's voice answered.

"I'm in Shaftesbury," Napoleon announced casually, "and I'm safe. How soon can you pick me up?"

There was a thoughtful silence from the other end, and then Illya said, "There was a little trouble with the car, Napoleon. A hole in the fuel tank left me dry near Dorchester. Fortunately we have a retired agent there. I left the case with him, and borrowed his transportation."

"Fine. How soon can you pick me up?"

"In Shaftesbury?"

"That's where I am, across the street from the Noughts and Crosses public house. How soon?"

"Twenty minutes."

"Fine. And hurry - I'm freezing."

The connection was ended, and Napoleon leaned back on the bench to watch the street.

About fifteen minutes later a muffled roar grew far away on the other side of town, and approached. Soon it was visible, coming up the street towards him - a fine, low-slung, broad-beamed motorcycle, purring gently up the street at fifty miles an hour. It slewed on the wet pavement, and Napoleon winced. Then he looked at it and winced again, more slowly.

Did the posture of the driver, the broad serious face, seem too familiar? The cycle rumbled heavily to a stop, and stood there muttering as the rider beckoned towards him and raised his protective mask to shout, “Come on, Napoleon. Hop aboard!” It was Illya.

“What’s that?” Solo asked doubtfully.

“It’s a motorcycle. Specifically, a Bruff-Sup, or formally, a Brough-Superior vintage 1935. Fifty-two horse power at top. Come on - hop aboard. I borrowed this from our friend at Clouds Hill, near Dorchester. He’ll want it back.”

Napoleon gathered his coat around him and climbed carefully up to the tiny padded square pillion seat behind his partner. With a moment’s search, his feet found the footpegs and his hands found the grip behind the front seat. Illya blipped the motor a few times, then gunned it and slipped the clutch, and instantly they were whipping along the shop-lined street, almost without a feeling of acceleration.

Solo’s knees, lifted by the footbraces, stuck out diagonally to either side of the hurtling machine. The wind, unbroken over Illya’s bent back, blasted into his face like powdered snow. His hair pulled at his scalp and his tie almost tore from under his vest.

They veered left, then left again, and were on a major through road which bore traffic even at this hour. A sign pointed to LONDON, 97 MILES. Their speed increased, and a voice floated back to him as Illya straightened and shouted something. Solo leaned forward and yelled, “What?”

Illya half-turned his head and shouted, “We’ll be in London in about an hour. Hang on!”

Napoleon did a fast calculation, and his jaw dropped. Speed-driven cold air forced into his mouth and out his nose before he snapped it shut again. Then he ducked down too, bending along the curve of the driver’s back, trying to keep the wind out of his eyes.

Engines roared faintly over the scream and thunder of the wind in his ears, and they began to overtake trucks. Great combinations, speeding towards London with goods and materials for the morning markets. Illya wound smoothly from lane to lane, passing them like a racer, keeping his speed up to an area Napoleon didn’t want to know about.

He clung to the handgrip and locked his fingers around it, and kept his eyes squeezed shut most of the time. He opened them once to see the trailers of two trucks side by side, filling the entire roadway ahead of them, and heard Illya shout, “Knees in, Napoleon!” as they shot between the trucks.

For a measurable part of a second there were two walls of swaying gray steel inches away from them on either side, and a noise that clogged the ears with sound. Wheels hissed on pavement, powerful engines thundered and wind screamed. And then they were out in the low golden sunlight, and the snouts of the trucks shrank away behind them. The road unwound ahead, and London lay waking at the end of it.

Chapter 11

How Napoleon and Illya Heard a Violin, and the Old Old Gentleman Spoke of Bees, Drugs, Death and Other Mysteries

DUSK WAS SPREADING over the gentle Sussex hills as Napoleon and Illya walked again along the winding lane that led back to Mr. Escott's bee farm. They talked quietly during the mile or two out from town.

"I never knew you felt that way about motorcycles, Napoleon."

"Well, I've never been that fond of them, and I do think your driving could have been more cautious."

"I wasn't used to the machine. Those old ones are tricky."

"All the same, I think the next time I'll wait for a helicopter from the local office."

They came around the curve of the dirt track and paused, as before, at the sight of the little cottage with the field of small hives behind it. And as they stood there, the faint wailing strains of a violin floated up to them. Both listened as they approached until the sounds were loud enough to form a recognizable melody. Illya nodded and said, "Chopin's Fantasie Impromptu."

Napoleon recognized the tune by another name, and made a face. "A whole island of punsters," he said wryly.

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind. I forgot your knowledge of American popular music starts with Charlie Parker and continues unidirectionally."

"Perhaps. I always preferred specialization."

"Umm," said Napoleon as the piece drew to an end and they stood on the doorstep of the cottage and knocked.

Several seconds later, the door opened and they were invited in. “And how did you find Stonehenge?” Mr. Escott asked as they sat down.

“Quite pleasant,” said Napoleon. “Everything went very much as predicted, and we collected the delivery. There was a little problem…”

“Our equipment proved somewhat inadequate,” Illya explained. “But we, ah, won through.”

“Tell me everything. Spare no detail, no matter how minor. I am no longer able to gather my own data in the field, but the hunter’s nose is still there.”

Once again they reported all they could about the operation, and again, when they were talked dry, Escott shifted the conversation. “I hope you won’t mind an hour’s idle conversation. Although solitary by nature, I occasionally find my remote location a trial, and human society is a rare delight. I observed you had some transportation trouble the moment you walked in, but resolved to let your story unfold. You, Mr. Kuryakin, had obviously had less trouble but rather farther to go.” The keen eyes narrowed slightly, and the old head nodded. “A long motorcycle ride always leaves its marks.” He smiled and leaned back, and added, “Though fewer than an ordinary bicycle.”

Napoleon and Illya looked at each other, wondering which would have to ask the inevitable question.

Napoleon lost. His suit had been cleaned and pressed again after his long walk through the foggy dew and that hurricane ride to London, and neither grass stain nor flaccid creases could have betrayed the morning’s activities. He finally opened his mouth and got as far as, “How could you have told it was a bicycle, though?”

Escott sighed politely, and pointed to Napoleon’s trouser-cuffs. “The fraying of the right cuff on the inside is characteristic of cycling. The fact that you returned to London is again apparent in the appearance of your creases. By the way, would you unhook that slipper beside the fire and hand it over here? Thank you.”

Illya performed the requested service, and they watched as Escott packed an aged meerschaum with a pungent mixture from the toe of the slipper. He handed it back, and then carefully set fire to his well-tamped pipe. Between puffs, he said, “But would you be willing to talk of your organization, and your opponent’s? I have heard rumors many places of something called Thrush, and I would be most interested to see if it bears any resemblance to a network I had some hand in cracking many years ago.”

For the next few hours, Napoleon and Illya described the nature of Thrush as well as they could. The satraps, the Supreme Council and the Ultimate Computer, the semi-independent operations that went on within this great hierarchy; the range of activities they participated in, always with an eye to their ends, which were, simply enough, the conquest of the entire world and its inhabitants.

Escott finished a pipe and began on another while they talked, and then told of his struggles against a prototype of Thrush. As it grew later in the evening, he brought out, refreshments and the conversation continued. They covered everything they had found out about the Rainbow Gang and its leader, and wandered afield into tastes in music and odd facts of life.

But in the relaxed atmosphere, Napoleon and Illya found themselves remembering little details. The type of caps worn by the men who drove his truck, or the odd smell about Johnnie Rainbow’s borrowed country estate. And gradually pieces of a picture began to build up, with Escott’s voice weaving the individual bits of evidence into a tapestry of circumstance that wound around men whose names were unknown, but whose presence made themselves felt everywhere. They saw the perfect simplicity of the lighthouse as a head quarters, safe, solitary, and well-defended. They saw glimpses of his network of representatives, strung out about the country, working independently but always available for an assignment; a network which fluctuated from moment to moment, evading a similar growing set being established by Thrush. Thrush had always had some difficulty establishing native agents in England, and to encounter this ready-made operation must have seemed a gift.

But in the course of their organizing drive, they occasionally ran into stumbling blocks. One such was Johnnie Rainbow, who wanted to keep England safe for the common burglar, and avoid foreign entanglements except those necessary to get loot out of the country. Escott made a comment that stuck in Napoleon's memory, to the effect that thieves were more deserving of prison terms than murderers. "A thief," he said, "is very hard to reform. By yielding to temptation once he has weakened his will to resist the next time. But a murderer, nine times out of ten, kills once, under a combination of circumstances that could never occur again, and then is punished so he may never repeat something he would be incapable of anyway." He paused, and sucked reflectively at his pipe. "But on the other hand there are those who would make murder a hobby - or a habit. These are the demons I most love to run to earth."

A small log in the fireplace snapped in the silence, and a golden shower of sparks spat onto the hearth stone.

"What are the things that drive men to murder, Mr. Solo? In my experience desperation of some kind is always evident. It may build slowly, like a banked fire, or it may blaze suddenly forth and destroy two lives - the victim and the killer." The old man's eyes shone in the light dancing from the fireplace. "These demons were my life's work, Mr. Solo. I had them catalogued, and could recognize a specimen by a single characteristic."

"Did you work alone, or were you part of a force?"

"Mostly alone. I was completely independent, except for a good and helpful friend. I made it my livelihood for many years, and prided myself that I had gained some measure of fame for my efforts. But now my talents are less in demand, and perhaps my grasp is slipping. It is not gone by any means - but could you please tell me, Mr. Solo, were you married at one time?"

Napoleon scarcely moved, but his eyes shifted first to Illya and then to the old man. "No," he said suddenly, with a quick grin. "Just a carefree bachelor." His glance turned to Illya, and grew very serious for a moment. "We ought to get back to the main problem, though. It's getting late, and there should be work to get done tomorrow."

He shifted position on the couch and addressed Escott again. “Do you have any ideas that might help us?”

The cue was not missed. Illya added, “It seems obvious to me that our course of action should be an invitation - ah, investigation, that is - of the lighthouse on Donzerly.”

The old man nodded. “It must be the location. From Rainbow’s speech it is obvious that Solo was being taken directly to where he was at the time, and his reference to the convenience of his headquarters indicates he would have been there. Unless he lives in a cave inside the cliffs, miraculously invisible to all the boats that pass, he must be on Donzerly. The only question that remains is will you take a small task force for a full-scale attack, or attempt an infiltration. The former would be safer and more effective, but the latter could net you invaluable data on his entire operation. How will you go about it, whichever you decide?”

“Stealth is our primary consideration,” Illya said. “Don’t you agree, Napoleon?”

Solo nodded. “The two of us should be able to sneak aboard that hunk of rock and pick out something valuable. It’s a very helpful ability of ours.”

“But Rainbow has all sorts of detection apparatus,” Illya said. “We’d have to allow for anything he could try to find us with - infrared, radar, sonar, light-amplification devices, or something Thrush has given him recently. How can we hope to foul all of them? I don’t relish the idea of swimming from the mainland in this weather, even with a wet-suit.”

“Well, we can’t fly. He’d see us in parachutes, and I’m not an accurate enough jumper to be sure of hitting such a small target.”

“That leaves a boat, and they’re easily seen,” Illya said.

“Unless there’s a fog,” Napoleon said. “That would also kill the light-amplification.”

“Infrared would work, but only with a short range,” Illya nodded.

“A good heavy rain would blind it.”

“But radar goes right through rain.”

Napoleon shrugged. “A low-profiled boat in a high sea is completely lost in ground clutter on radar.”

Illya sighed. “Sonar?”

“Wind, and turbulence on the surface. But they wouldn’t cover the sound of a motorboat.”

“In other words you want us to go across several miles of open sea in a full storm in a small, low-profile sail boat.” Illya’s voice did not change during this sentence, but there was a hint of raggedness.

“Essentially,” Napoleon admitted.

“Now, I know you’re an expert small-boat handler, Napoleon. You can do very nice turns around Long Island Sound in a skiff. But to take a small boat out in a storm…”

“Illya, it’ll be perfectly safe. Probably. Depending on how severe the storm is.”

“How can we tell when we start out how bad the storm will get? We would be swamped, capsized and sunk unless we had a very strong-hulled boat with sealed flotation chambers.”

Escott leaned back in his old wing-chair and watched smiling as the two younger men thrashed out the solution to their own problem. This method had become more and more natural to him in later years, and he liked it. When his mind occasionally clouded, he could still guide others to the logical conclusions in their ways.

“All our gear could be packed in watertight compartments, and the sailors said there was a floating dock there left out in all weathers. We could even come in there.”

Illya nodded, and Napoleon rose, saying, “Think it over for a minute while I get a drink of water.”

As he left Escott leaned forward, a look of intense curiosity on his face. “Mr. Kuryakin, if it would not be betraying a confidence, could you tell me - did Mr. Solo lie about his marriage?”

Illya glanced at the closed kitchen door, thou quickly, and decided the truth was deserved. “Yes, did. It’s not a confidence, but he doesn’t like to be reminded of it. Married at nineteen, wife was killed in an automobile accident a year later. Sometimes I think he’s never

gotten over it. He probably denied it a moment ago through shock reaction."

Escott nodded. "I quite understand," he said. "Sorry to have intruded."

"I won't mention it."

Napoleon popped through the kitchen door again, asking, "Are you willing?" and Illya, caught slightly by surprise, said "Of course," before he had fully grasped the question.

"Fine," said Solo. "Tomorrow we will return to Baycombe and see about reserving an appropriate vessel for the next good storm."

"That should be in a few days. A low-pressure area was reported moving down from the Norwegian Sea, and within three days you will have all the storm you could desire," Escott said with a smile. "Today is Friday… that gives you the whole weekend to make your preparations. You may spend the night here if you wish, and take a main-line train tomorrow morning towards Baycombe."

"Well, it's a fair walk back to town…" Napoleon admitted.

"There will be my own honey with breakfast - the finest honey produced in this whole Kingdom," said Escott.

"Quite a temptation," Illya said, glancing at Napoleon, who nodded agreement. "Thank you. We accept both invitations."

Chapter 12

How Illya Discovered the Pleasures of Seafaring, and Napoleon Solo Sought a Rainbow in the Midst of a Storm

SATURDAY THEY returned to Baycombe, and with help from their friends there, found a satisfactory boat. Sunday was beautiful again, with a light breeze from the north hinting of the storm to come. Napoleon and Illya attended Father John's mass in the morning, and went with Joey and Aunt Jane for a picnic in the afternoon. They sat in the grass atop a low cliff overlooking the sea and talked of inconsequentials.

Joey showed them what looked like a military Pill box - the remains of a Coastal Defense Station better than fifty years old. "It looks as if someone tried to convert it into a cottage," Joey said. "I can't think why."

"I can," said Napoleon. "This would be a nice place to get utterly away from the world. Just the wind and the sea, and a safe solid place to hide from the weather. If it's still around when I retire, maybe I'll see about buying it. That's probably what the previous inhabitant did."

"Oh no," Aunt Jane said. "This was the residence of a young man - about six feet tall and quite athletic. He had an older man with him, and was quite well off."

Illya sighed. "You were taught that trick by Mr. Escott, weren't you. Go ahead. How can you tell?"

"There are holes in the wall above the sink where a mirror was mounted. Its height indicated the height of its user. The older man had the second room back; he was in the position of a servant, because the younger man had the larger bedroom with the window."

Napoleon and Illya examined the areas she indicated, and Illya looked up first. "He must have either been well off or subject to

fluctuations in fortune," he said. "There was no difference at all in the color or texture of the paper where nailholes indicate something was hanging, like a picture."

"Therefore," continued Napoleon without a pause, "he spent all sorts of money making the place livable and then moved out very shortly."

Aunt Jane nodded proudly. "That was quite good. I hadn't noticed that myself - my statement was based on other evidence. You see how your association with him has sharpened your eyes."

Napoleon and Illya looked at each other. Perhaps it was so - they hoped it was.

Monday blew up cloudy and cold. It started to rain around noon, while Napoleon and Illya were down at the dock making sure all their gear was safely stowed. They sealed the last box and hurried back up the street to Joey's house. There they had a hearty lunch and lay down for a few more hours' sleep before the long night ahead.

It was dark when they awoke, and Joey had supper ready for them. The storm was higher, and wind muttering around the house like an animal. They ate again, light, rich food which would keep them going through the cold without overloading their stomachs.

They spent nearly half an hour getting dressed for the excursion, from warm undergarments out through several layers to the waterproofs they slipped on over the entire ensemble. A last steaming cup of tea, and they were ready to go.

Two electric torches lighted their way down to the sheltered harbor, where the waves, even with force abated, tossed their craft from side to side, bouncing against the pilings and tugging at her moorings.

Illya looked at his partner and shook his head. "The storm is getting worse," he said. "Only an idiot would go out in an open boat on a night like this."

"I know," said Napoleon. "You ready?"

"Of course."

The waterfront was deserted in the storm, and alone the U.N.C.L.E. agents rigged the boat and cast off. Napoleon pushed the dock away with a small spar at the crest of one wave, and hauled up the single jib sail they would use. Illya hung on the rudder as he had been instructed, and the wind caught them up and hurled them from the shore.

It took some work to keep them from the end of the breakwater, but shouted instruction and bruised hands brought them clearly past the rain-dimmed lighthouse into the sweep of the open sea.

The wind was steady, here, and in a matter of minutes Napoleon had them so rigged that it bore them along, heading crabwise towards a particular compass setting. Rain slashed at the deck and tore at their foul-weather gear, which was earning its name. The tiller had been lashed, and Illya had nothing to do but hold on, and adjust the lines from time to time. Holding on still took most of his attention.

Napoleon was up at the prow where the jib was belayed, one hand on a cleat and the other on the rope, keeping the sail trimmed as the slamming waves against her hull tried to force her to fall away from her true course. He was really at home on a somewhat smaller boat, but he adjusted his touch and had the craft under good control for all her bucking. Boiling waves swept up around him and tore at his legs as they raced across the deck. The salt spray stung his eyes and chilled his exposed face, and the sharp tang of it tasted in the back of his mouth. He leaned back on a fixed line and looked for Illya.

The Russian was holding onto the starboard rail with both hands, facing away from the wind, kneeling on the hard bench that ran around the inside of the cockpit. The tiller was securely fastened at the proper angle, but the wind was beginning to shift again.

Napoleon shouted his partner’s name, and Illya straightened at once. “Aye aye, Captain,” floated back over the howl of the wind.

“Stand by the tiller,” Napoleon told him as he made his way aft. “The wind’s turning.”

Illya bent over the long handle and released one of the lines that held it, letting the rudder back easily, though it threatened to wrench itself out of his grip. Napoleon refastened the line on the lee side while Illya tied down the other, then leaped, or more accurately

scrambled precariously, back to his position at the bow. The jib had to be adjusted.

On the way he took a quick look at the inertial guidance device whose glowing display showed through the spray-splattered glass plate. They had come about a quarter of the way to the island, and were essentially on course. Napoleon checked his repeated compass, and returned to the prow.

At the far end of the boat, Illya crouched in a cockpit that was regularly filled with water and drained, several times a minute. The stern, sturdy with flotation tanks, seemed to bounce about more than the rest of the boat, and he was holding on with his eyes shut against the driving wind-blown salt whipped in froth off the tops of the leaping waves and flung in his face by the storm. The tiller fought viciously against the ropes that held it, bucking and straining against them as the boat strove to hold its course. A few degrees either way in this blindness could land them in Wales, if they held up that long under the hammering the Bristol Channel was giving them - or out in the Irish Sea, where the full fury of the storm swept down over open water for a hundred miles.

He had nothing against boats, certainly; his naval training had left him quite accustomed to them. But it had also taught him the folly of attempting such a passage in rough weather - if rough was quite the word he wanted. Only his sincere faith in the incredible luck of Napoleon Solo convinced him they could make the crossing. He had been with Napoleon long enough to know what kind of long chances he could take and still come out on top.

Napoleon, meanwhile, didn’t care. Even the goal of the little island of Donzerly where they were bound shrank to a small corner of his mind. His whole concentration was focused on his personal, physical struggle with the wind for the mastery of the boat.

Now there was a stout rope tied around his waist and securely belayed to a sunken cleat, lessening the danger slightly. Still the storm whipped about him, pulling and throwing him from side to side. This, he thought, was really his element, battling nature with only a stout ship and his own skill between him and disaster. Even his

stomach was holding up well, considering the beating it was getting. He wasn't sure how Illya was doing, astern.

Neither was Illya. The world had resolved into two simple bits of awareness - the rudder must be kept set, and remember which is the downwind rail. Time lost its identity, and was blown away by the endless howl of the wind and the slashing of the silver-dagger rain. It could have been an hour or six months before he became aware of Napoleon calling his name again.

During this period, Napoleon too lost track of reality to some extent. Shaken, bruised, pounded by wind and wave for another indefinite length of time, he gradually heard something over the noise of the storm. So faint and blown-about was the sound, fading beyond the range of hearing from moment to moment, he wasn't sure whether it was his imagination. But then he heard it again, a little louder. The sound bellowed against the night that surrounded it, bellowed and fell away as it paused for breath, then bellowed forth again. The deep distant note cut through under the sounds of rain and wind, and it grew as it sounded again.

Napoleon made a quick knot to hold the sheet reefed, and clambered back to the inner cockpit where the internal guidance calculator continued its eerie green-lit gyrations. They were within two hundred yards of Rainbow's island headquarters!

He spun back to the stern and shouted, "Illya! Stand by to come about! Illya!" The Russian stirred numbly from his position at the tiller and nodded.

"Aye, aye. Ready to come about, sir," he said.

"Watch for my hand signal and swing the tiller towards the same direction as my hand points, about half way."

"Got it," said Illya as Solo scrambled back to his look out post.

Now he began to hear something else under the rain and the lonely hoot of the foghorn - a sea-bell, rocked and rung by the leaping waves at the shore of the island. And then, as they swerved to approach directly, he could hear the hiss of gravel as it was sucked and rolled by the roots of the waves that passed over, and he knew they were very close.

Suddenly a sheer wall of jagged rock loomed out of the night, towering into the darkness beyond their feeble running lights. The bell rang clearly to their right, and Napoleon thrust the rock away with his spar.

They were half in the lee of the island now - the back eddies of the storm pushed them fitfully from side to side, but the force of it was cut. With Illya quick on the rudder, and Napoleon switching the jib from side to side as the rough gusts shifted, they beat along not forty feet from the face of a rugged cliff, as the bell grew louder ahead.

At last, dim against the rain-glittering darkness, they could see a tiny floating dock, at the foot of a wooden staircase that staggered up the face of the cliff and out of sight. They steered in as close as possible, and Napoleon, rope around his waist, poised on the rail, holding onto a brace with one hand, gauged the rise and fall of the dock and the boat, waited, watched, and finally leaped.

The ship lurched towards the shore as he jumped, giving an extra impetus which may have saved him. He landed on hands and knees on the pitching surface of the little square dock, and clutched at an upright to save himself from being pulled away. As the pull slacked off, he hauled in the rope and got an end of it around the same upright with two turns before the waves forced them apart again. This time the boat was held near, and he hauled in more line. When the prow was held securely to the dock and only the stern swung free, he tied it down solidly and ran aft, where Illya threw him the stern line.

The procedure was repeated in a matter of moments, since half the weight of the boat was already anchored, and Illya leaped to the dock, an oilcloth bundle under his arm.

Together they fought their way up the water-slick wood of the narrow stairs. Unwilling to surrender them, the storm seemed to increase in fury, trying to pull them from their perch and carry them away. They climbed, back and forth; twenty steps and a landing - turn around - twenty steps and a landing. The sound of the sea fell away beneath them as they climbed, and the storm came at them from below as well. The dock was now lost to sight, and nothing showed above them yet. Each had a waterproof electric torch, which

served no more than to show them where the steps were before them. Their beams were swallowed up by the night less than twenty feet away.

Then there were no more steps, and the top of the rock, rainlashed and windswept, spread before them. Forty feet away across an artificial-looking flat smooth area stood the darkened lighthouse, tall and white, gaunt and forbiddingly lonely in the stormy night. No lights showed anywhere. The foghorn bellowed and died again.

Both paused at the top of the stairs and looked at their goal.

Illya caught up to Napoleon and said, “Well, there it is. Shall we just go try the door?”

“Why not? It has to be the right place.”

“There’s no place like it anywhere near here,” said Illya. “Come on. Let’s get out of the rain.”

They hurried across the open field towards the tower, their lights extinguished. A quick search around the base found a door—the only opening apparent at ground level. Huddling over the handle, lights dimmed by fingers over the lenses, they tested the handle. It turned, and the door gave slightly inwards. No light showed around the frame.

Illya looked up doubtfully, and Napoleon shrugged. “Who would bother to lock a door on an island as well guarded as this? Remember the same situation on Dauringa Island?”

The Russian agent nodded, and pushed the door open, to dart the attenuated beam of his torch into the room.

It was empty. They ducked inside quickly and closed the door behind them.

In the relative silence, they looked around. There was a desk in one corner, and two doors opening in different directions. The one on the right ahead of them showed a light, and led down. The one on the left side bore a sign saying, COMMUNICATIONS. KEEP OUT.

Napoleon smiled. “I knew,” he said, “we would find a Rainbow at the end of the storm.”

Section IV

“The Rainbow Comes and Goes”

Chapter 13

How A Lighthouse Proved Larger Within Than Without, and Napoleon and Illya Became Unexpected Guests

THEY HAD ENTERED the lighthouse on the ground floor, and had more or less expected to be at the bottom. But the relative sizes of the doors leading up and down indicated that the far greater portion of traffic went down into the rock. They passed the desk and looked through the glass doors.

“It’s Dauringa Island all over again, isn’t it?” said Napoleon in a whisper. “Only the stairs go down.”

“And shall we?”

“Why not?” After checking the edges of the door for concealed alarm switches and concealing their outer garments in a cupboard, they passed through the double doors into a rough-hewn rock stairwell leading down to a landing and switching back.

“I wonder how far down it goes,” Illya murmured.

“Considering its proprietor, the other end probably comes up in the Royal Mint.”

They descended past a door on the next level down, and stopped at the second. “How interested are you in getting all the way to the bottom of this?”

“Not especially. Besides, we’d have to climb all the way back up. Let’s look in here.”

“My idea precisely.” They leaned on the push-bar and the door swung open, revealing a narrow corridor some fifty feet long. Flat-painted plywood partitions formed walls, and fluorescent lighting fixtures hung from the rocky ceiling. One light in ten was still on, splashing shadowed blue-white light over the offices and into the corridor. At the far end, under what might have been the generator house attached to the light upstairs, an open door with a heavy bar

across it let into an unlit space. They walked, rubber-sole silent, down the hall towards it.

Name tags were slipped into slots on the doors as they passed - normal names with nothing in common to show why they would appear inside an artificial cave under a lighthouse in the Bristol Channel. It was uncanny. Napoleon suddenly had the impression that the western branch of the London Underground terminated two floors below them, and that these offices were daily filled with ordinary commuters. He shook his head to clear it, and looked down at the room beyond the open doorway.

It was an empty shaft, faced on the inside with well-finished cement, apparently awaiting an elevator. Light shone against the far side of the shaft many feet below them, indicating the next level down.

Napoleon stepped back from the edge. “If it’s all the same to you,” he murmured, ‘I’ll walk down.”

“I checked the doors,” said Illya. “All locked. Apparently they aren’t completely lax on security. Want to check the other side of the stairwell?”

They moved quietly back to the central space, and checked through the facing door. An identical bank of offices, with a large wooden door at the far end, in the same position as the unfinished shaft on the other side. And as they looked, lights faded on behind them. They straightened slowly, and did not turn.

A voice behind them said politely, “Straight ahead, gentlemen, and through the door at the far end.” The voice spoke in a tone which indicated it came from behind a gun.

Napoleon was first, and Illya followed him. As their captor came last through the door, Illya spoke. “Good evening, Mr. Rainbow. Sorry to drop in unexpectedly like this, but the storm was getting worse.”

A soft chuckle came from behind them. “I am slightly hurt that you spied out my hideaway so quickly. Obviously I erred in attempting to bring Mr. Solo here with inadequate preparation.”

“As you see, I made it anyway,” said Napoleon. “Nice little place you have here.”

“Thank you. It just shows what one can do if one is handy with money. Yes, just push the doorhandle and go in. I’m afraid we haven’t got automatic doors yet.”

Illya snorted. “Automatic doors? You don’t even have an elevator!”

“Illya!” said Napoleon. “That’s rude!”

“Help yourselves to chairs, please.” The door closed behind them and the room lights faded on. They found soft, form-fitting chairs and sat down. Out from behind them strolled a stocky figure, informally clad, with a pipe in one hand and the other in a pocket.

“I hope you’re comfortable,” he said. “Would you care for a drink?”

They declined politely. He touched a button on the large desk that dominated the comfortably furnished room. Some thirty seconds later there was a sharp rap at the door, and two armed men came in, both in pajamas.

“Pete, Willy, will you get our guests settled in comfortably? I’ll want to talk with them in the morning.” He shifted his attention to Napoleon. “It will be a pleasure meeting you, Mr. Solo. I have been warned about you many times.”

Napoleon and Illya were helped out of their chairs and hustled out of the room again and down the hail. As they went, Napoleon managed to ask Illya, “He didn’t have a gun on us, did he?”

Illya shook his head, and looked sour.

Somewhat to Napoleon’s surprise, they did spend rather a comfortable night, although fully aware of the locks on their door. His watch registered nine o’clock when there was a buzz at the door, and a voice announced, “Breakfast.”

“Bring it in,” said Illya with a shrug to Solo.

Two armed men brought in trays and set them on a table. “Best fresh up a bit,” one of them said. “The old man’ll be wanting to see you in an hour or so. Just stack the trays by the door, sir.” And they popped out, drop ping the latch behind them.

Breakfast taken care of, the U.N.C.L.E. agents found a washstand and other sanitary necessities in an adjoining room. By shortly after ten they were reasonably well-kempt and ready to meet their host

again. The escort was announced by another buzz at the door; Illya opened it to find two different men. One of them threw him a casual salute.

“Mr. Rainbow requests your presence,” he said. “Come along.”

They came, down a corridor, up a flight of stairs, and back into the same master office they had visited the night before. Lights were on now, and the furnishings of the room could be seen. It was almost spartan in its simplicity, with only a few concessions to comfort. The desk was large enough to double as a map-table, and doubtless often did. The chair behind it was upright but comfortable, and capable of some movement. The other chairs of the office were low, form-fitting designs of slick leather. They struck a jarringly sybaritic note in the sturdy practical decor.

Napoleon and Illya sank, side by side, into two of them. “You like to make your guests comfortable, at least,” Napoleon commented.

“Quite practical,” said Rainbow. “A comfortable man is easier to deal with. They also take quite some time and effort to arise from, giving me an edge should I be forced to defend myself.”

He sank into the chair behind the desk and leaned forward to watch them. “At last I have you both where I can ask you. Precisely why is the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement interested in a man who is, essentially, only a very good bank robber?”

Illya looked pointedly at Napoleon and said, “I’ve been wondering that myself.”

Napoleon shook his head. “Only because that bank robber was showing interest in Thrush. Enough of your operations are already known to put you away for quite some time.”

“Quite true, Mr. Solo - quite true. But first I will have to be found. This lighthouse represents my stronghold, and a considerable investment as well. Yet here you are, in the midst of it. This could compromise my security.” He shook his head.

“The easiest way out is to clump you off the cliffs into the sea, with your heads staved in. You would have been dashed to pieces by the storm. But I dislike murder.”

“I’m inexpressibly pleased to hear that,” said Napoleon.

Rainbow smiled. “No doubt. Perhaps this would be the time to try one of the last shipments of largess from Thrush. It’s a hypnotic which allows selected portions of the subject’s memory to be completely blanked out. It’s quite safe, and otherwise harmless. This would be a perfect opportunity to try it out.”

Illya glanced around from where he lay. “This isn’t much of secret hideout,” he said. “No TV monitors, no banks of communications gear, no computers humming away… How do you accomplish anything?”

“Our communications gear is up in the light tower. We have a few small computer accessories - we keep punch-card files on every available worker capable of functioning within our discipline for a period. We can find the right man for any job in a matter of seconds. But we don’t have electronic calculators. I’d like to have a television monitoring system installed in the next year or so, but it’s taken an unconscionable amount of money getting it this far.” He gestured around the room.

“The entire volume of this rock was hollowed out by demolitions experts, trained in the military, now renting their talents out to those who can pay. Other members of our ranks did the finishing, installed the necessary machinery in the lowest level, and got everything working. We have a dependable source of electric power, fresh running water - all the comforts of civilization.”

He leaned back in his chair. “You will pardon me for being proud of the place,” he said. “You may also be interested to know that when I bought this island from the Crown in 1964, I was faced with only one severely competitive bid. I later traced it to Thrush, before they were even certain of my existence. I have always fancied this as rather a *coup*.”

“You’ve done all this in only three years?”

“In my spare time, and with a great deal of help. There are three levels below the surface of the rock, and the lowest is also below sea level. That is where the generators, air conditioners, water-purifiers and pumps are located. Presently the generators burn diesel fuel; we are working on a system to use the energy of the waves, or the tides.

The second level, where we are presently, contains the offices of my specialists and advisors. The immediately subsurface level contains the residential section. The accommodations are not of the finest, but considering the expense I think I may well be proud of it."

"You well may," said Napoleon. "You do have some security devices around, though you lack television surveillance of the entire interior. Just simple electric eyes?"

"Infrared sensitive photoelectric cell in strategic locations, Mr. Solo. Other areas have conductance-balanced fields around them, so that if anything moves, it triggers a signal.

"Incidentally, our commissary here is quite good. We were fortunate enough to procure the services of a man trained as a cook by the Royal Submarine Service, and our cuisine, despite the limitations of our galley, is among the best in this quarter of England."

"What do you do for entertainment?"

Rainbow chuckled. "The usual things, I'm afraid. We watch the telly evenings, and play bridge. We have a projector and a few films. Actually, this island is still rather a hardship post, because of the isolation. And it is run like a flagship, to be honest. The fixed flagship of my army." He enjoyed the mixed phrase a moment. "We have no uniforms, you will notice," he continued seriously. "Many of our workers have unpleasant associations connected with them. Besides, the informality of appearance is unimportant. They are all independent workers, voluntarily united under my orders."

He leaned forward across his desk. "This is what I have now that Thrush cannot give me. The knowledge that I have earned the trust and respect of these men. Thrush seeks to command by fear, sir, and I will not cooperate with that. The strongest impression I have gotten from my few contacts with the representative of Thrush has been one of depersonalization. In the men I have seen - I call them men, though they acted more like robots - there seemed an absolute lack of individuality. Even if, as has been indicated, this is characteristic of local operatives more than most, any organization that must ever instill such qualities in its workers holds no place for me!"

He leaned back in his chair, silent at the end of his statement, and clipped the tip from a cigar. He looked from Napoleon to Illya, where they sat silent, considering. And suddenly he smiled again.

“Was that what you came five thousand miles to hear? I have no intention of cooperation with Thrush. They are fighting against everything I respect: freedom, individual initiative, the differences between all people. Damme, sir - they’re un-English.”

He blew a blue cloud of cigar smoke, and rose to his feet. “Would you care to join me for lunch before we tour the premises?”

Illya shifted his weight, preparatory to getting up. “If it’s not too much to ask, why are you showing us every thing if you’re only going to erase it? Just showing off?”

“Not entirely, Mr. Kuryakin. I am expecting some form of communication from Thrush, and I will want you to hear and consider it while in full possession of your faculties. Now come along with me. The first setting of lunch will be ready shortly, and you should see the galley in operation.”

Chapter 14

How The Man In The Gray Suit Appeared Once More, and a Treaty of Necessity Was Made

SHORTLY AFTER LUNCH they finished a brief tour, and returned to Rainbow's office. Here he produced for their inspection several of the devices Thrush had sent him.

"This is designed for the smuggling of small valuable items past any customs system in the world. It looks like a torch cell, and is carried in a torch."

"An old gag," said Illya. "If the flashlight doesn't work, they check the batteries."

"So old no one would be likely to try it. Except that this one works. Built into one end is a 1-1/2 volt mercury cell. The body of the case is lead-shielded to protect film from fogging. Film, by the way, is always sent exposed but unprocessed. Unless the container is opened in a darkroom, the information is destroyed."

He set the battery back on the counter and moved on. "We have seen some of Thrush's current attempts to maintain technical superiority. Now over here is an eavesdropping device which…"

A bell chimed softly, and Rainbow turned. On a ground glass plate in the wall a picture appeared, in somewhat hazy color, of a small power launch approaching. The scene was distorted as if seen through a long telephoto lens.

"Another unannounced visitor," said Johnnie Rainbow. "I wonder who else has developed a sudden interest in my ocean hideaway."

"I thought you didn't have television," said Napoleon.

"Come now!" said Rainbow. "This is merely a projection of the view seen by the periscope above the top of the light tower. It is manually guided by a lookout whom I can reach on the intercom system." He

touched a button on the desk. “Bert, do you have a higher magnification?”

A second later the view seemed to flip over and was replaced by a flattened, hazy, slightly quivering shot of the cockpit. “Thank you,” said Rainbow. “Hold on the cockpit.”

He walked over to the ground glass and looked at it very closely while Napoleon and Illya looked at each other. Perhaps he didn’t have television, but he got along all right. The Russian muttered, “Just as I thought. It’s all done with mirrors.”

Rainbow paid no attention to them. He studied the unsteady image for several seconds, and then nodded. “It’s the Thrush representative. I met him officially once, in the City, and I’ve had him watched off and on for some time. He’s been trying to talk to me again. Apparently he has decided on a direct approach. Well, I suppose I’ll have to let him in.”

He ordered the picture of the wall to a full shot again, and had the boat tracked visually all the way to the dock. As it was coming in, and for a minute thereafter, he spoke quickly to Napoleon and Illya as they got to their feet.

“The Thrush has been becoming increasingly importunate in the last few weeks, and frankly I am beginning to be somewhat concerned. You will probably find it educational to watch the proceedings. Through that door you will find a short stairway leading to an observational post where you will be able to survey the room and hear all that transpires. I hope I can trust you not to betray your presence.”

They went up the stairs to a slightly cramped cubby hole somehow fitted into the structure of the office. Gauze-covered windows allowed them to view the room below through sections of the molding, and sound reached them clearly. They crouched, and watched.

Rainbow returned to his desk, looked carefully around the room, and checked the observers with a glance. He sat as a bell chimed, and rose again as the door beneath the spy-hole opened and the Thrush came in.

From overhead, he appeared as a faultless gray bowler, which he doffed as he entered. His hair was black, graying slightly, and thin. Johnnie Rainbow invited him to sit in one of the deep form-fitting chairs, and he placed his briefcase beside it and carefully perched on the edge.

“Let us get directly to business,” he began. “We have reason to believe that two agents of the U.N.C.L.E. infiltrated your island in the storm last night. We also assume that you captured them. Now we would like you to turn them over to us.”

Rainbow looked at him with an expression of injured disbelief. “Infiltrators he said. “On Donzerly? Ridiculous!”

“Two men, one fair, one dark. Will you claim that they are still here undetected?”

Stung by the implied insult, Rainbow snapped, “Sir, my security is unparalleled. A ghost could not penetrate without detection.”

The Thrush nodded. “Then you have them. What would you like in return for them? I am authorized to offer you a fifteen-passenger hydraulic lift, completely installed and maintained, for these men.”

Rainbow paused, and looked thoughtful. Above and behind the seated Thrush, Napoleon and Illya I at each other and wondered. But finally he shook his head.

“I’m afraid your offer, though attractive, will not be able to tempt me. I have my own uses for these men.”

The Thrush shifted his weight uneasily. “The local satrap wants these men,” he said, “and will therefore have them.”

Johnnie Rainbow rose and looked down at him. “These men are my personal prisoners, and mine to be done with as I please. I am not pleased to give them over to you.”

The man in the gray suit allowed the trace of an edge to appear in his voice. “Mr. Rainbow, please sit down.” The command was voiced in such a way that when Johnnie gradually sank to his chair it seemed as though he was obeying. His visitor continued. “We have invested quite a fair amount in you. Many of our most advanced devices were given to you for field testing, and you have made

considerable profit through them. You owe us a debt for this, and the time has come for payment. Give us the U.N.C.L.E. agents."

Rainbow was recovering his aplomb. "Why are you suddenly so anxious to have them? Surely you have had better opportunities than now."

"They have acquired great strategic importance; how, does not concern you."

"I'm sorry. As my prisoners, they are my responsibility. And I could not hand control of their fate over to you. Although my dark career sometimes involves the crime of stealing,'" he quoted, "I do prefer to draw the line at cold murder."

The Thrush paused and looked at him. "Come now, Mr. Rainbow. I can think of no fewer than … twenty-seven in which your organization has been involved."

Rainbow leaned forward, and his face was dark. "Falsehood, sir!" he said. "In five years, only six killings have been the direct result of my operations, and those were accidental and regrettable. My work is robbery, sir - not murder."

"Nevertheless, it must happen from time to time. You should know what lengths are necessary for survival, let alone success. You have the ability, the character, and the talents an organization like Thrush needs. You have a high level of competence, and would rise far in our Hierarchy. This little island of England is nothing, compared to the area you could control. With us behind you, your network could expand over all of Europe. And we would be able to apply your powers to what ever problems faced us."

The man in the gray suit looked around the room. "This little hole in the rock is like Robin Hood's cave. How far do you think you can go, with your center of operations out here in the wilderness? Join our efforts, and this little island of Donzerly will be only a crude starting place. All England and as much of the rest of the world as you could command, when we have achieved our goal."

This took several seconds to recover from. Rainbow cleared his throat and his moustache fluttered. "Perhaps we have missed an understanding," he said slowly. "Power, *per se*, has no especial

attraction for me. I'm not in this business for power - I'm in it for money. And the challenge." He smiled suddenly. "It's the greatest game in the world. And you people are being too bloody serious about it." He stood up again and held out his hand. "I'm afraid you can't have the U.N.C.L.E. agents, my good man. I hope you have enjoyed your trip out here, because you will have no other satisfaction to take back with you. Good afternoon."

The man in the gray suit rose slowly to his feet. Napoleon and Illya could not see his face, but his voice was tightly controlled. "We have indeed missed an understanding. We will have those men from you one way or another, and you may never control Europe if you persist in your stubbornness."

"I have no desire to control Europe. They probably deserve whatever troubles they have, and I'd rather let them fight. England holds all I shall ever want or need." He smiled. "The Bank of England, the Crown Jewels, the British Museum… I am satisfied with much less than the whole world, but I will not part with what I have."

The Thrush picked up his bowler and his briefcase. "If you are not willing to work with us, Mr. Rainbow, you certainly cannot be allowed to continue working at cross-purposes. We are a worldwide organization, and for a local operation to interfere with our larger plans is unheard of. If this sounds like a threat, please accept it as such."

Rainbow stood firmly, but his face clouded again. "Damme, sir, if I will give over to a bunch of heaven-forsaken foreigners. The finest police force in the world has been unable to run me to earth - you found me only by a stroke of fortune. You could not stop me and my men if it were to be an all-out war. My men are of the people, and can move among them at will. You will find few good men willing to join your organization in this country."

The visitor remained unmoved. "You will contact us as you have been instructed within the next twelve hours," he said. "Four-thirty tomorrow morning. Before that time you will have agreed to a price for these men. There is no alternative."

He turned and left. A messenger closed the door, and Johnnie Rainbow sank slowly into his seat. After several seconds he spoke

again in a normal voice. “Mr. Solo - Mr. Kuryakin. Come down to the office again, please.”

They descended the narrow stairs and rejoined their host. He looked up as they entered, and a trace of strain showed around his eyes.

“I give you my word, gentlemen, that this was not prearranged. Thrush is indeed pecking at my heels.” He gestured them back to their seats, and continued. “It was by no means altruistic that I withheld you from their grasp. My ancestry is Scots, and wanton wastefulness is alien to my nature. I believe Thrush merely wanted to establish mastery over me. But I will not give way to them. I consider them not only melodramatic to the point of foolishness, but far too enamored of simple violence for my tastes. I have reached a point, gentlemen, where I need no longer take orders from men whom I do not respect.

“Thrush may be able to defeat me - they have the power, certainly, but I question their ability.” He smiled briefly. “I expect to take a lot of killing. At this moment, since this is apparently to be a war, I must do all I can to inflict damage on my enemy before his impending attack. I have an advantage over him because of the extreme amorphousness of my operation. I have less than thirty people working for me full-time; all my labor is contracted out to independents who know nothing beyond their assignment. Thrush, on the other hand, has a fairly large central organization with a number of local semi-autonomous things -”

“Satraps,” said Illya. “Although the correct term is ‘satrapy’ for the local group, and ‘satrap’ being the individual in charge. The meaning has slipped askew in three or four thousand years.”

“Thrush Central is large,” agreed Napoleon, “but highly mobile. It seems to be able to be anywhere in the world, but it doesn’t stay there, but it doesn’t move. We hope to get a little more data on this sometime. The satrapies are in constant communication with Central, where the Ultimate Computer is located.”

Rainbow nodded. “They keep in touch by means of a miniaturized satellite computer on a random time sharing basis. The satrap has a small computer-combined-with-multiplex-transceiver. The whole

thing can travel in a large suitcase or a small trunk. It is tied into the Master, which in this case is the Ultimate Computer, and is used for most secure messages, instant access to all data anywhere within the organization, daily orders, and all record storage. A Thrush-backed small business with a satellite computer can edge out its competition because it will not have to buy time on a computer or maintain one."

Illya's eyes were a little wider than usual. "The satellite has access to the entire storage of the Ultimate Computer?" he said quietly.

"Of course," said Rainbow. "But the satellites are heavily protected against kidnapping. Any attempt to take one without authorization would simply result in the machine's wiping all memory banks and irretrievably severing communications with the Ultimate Computer."

"Nothing is perfect," said Napoleon. "It would be a challenge."

Rainbow smiled. "We may discuss that later," he said. "There is much more you might like to know. Before I give it to you, I offer a treaty. My operation may be severely damaged soon, and your job will essentially have been accomplished. Will you agree to do what you can to keep U.N.C.L.E. off my back for a while in return for useful information and - possibly - some practical cooperation against Thrush?"

"We can't promise anything," said Napoleon. "But we can make a full and favorable report to our chief, including your offer. He is the only one who can accept or decline."

"I could ask little better," said Rainbow. "You are men of honor, and your word is good."

"Thank you," said Illya. "Now about that computer…"

Chapter 15

How Napoleon and Illya Departed Precipitously, and the Dawn Truly Came Up Like Thunder

THE REMAINDER of the afternoon was spent in conversation. Illya's photographic memory took down everything he heard and fastened the threads together.

"There are three Ultimate Computers, actually," said Johnnie Rainbow at one point. "And here and there about the world, in the most unexpected places, are large concealed areas with a water supply, electrical lines, sewage, and full covers. One Thrush Central, call it *alpha*, is in one of these - perhaps a warehouse in Liverpool. At the same time, in a large cave in Argentina, Thrush Central *beta* is on standby, ready to go into operation literally at a second's notice. Also at the same time, Thrush Central *gamma* is in transit from an office building in Karachi to a tramp freighter which will cruise about the Pacific Ocean for several weeks. When *gamma* is completely set up and functioning, *alpha* dumps the records since it went active into *beta's* bank, and hands active control over to *beta*. Then *alpha* transfers all data into *gamma's* bank, *gamma* goes on standby, and *alpha* is torn down and moved to Reykjavik. One Thrush Central may maintain control for as short a time as two weeks or as long as two months. The Computer tells them when and where to move in a completely random manner.

"The twelve members of the Supreme Council very rarely meet. Their communications are normally through their satellite computers, and the Ultimate Computer maintains records of all their discussions."

"And the satellite computers have complete access to the Ultimate Computer," Illya said again under his breath.

"But they are impossible to steal," Rainbow reminded him, and Illya looked up strangely.

“*Are* they impossible to steal?” he asked directly.

Johnnie cleared his throat. “I don’t know yet,” he said, and the corners of his eyes crinkled slightly. Then he rose to his feet. “Come along, gentlemen. I would like to see how the work is proceeding.” He guided them to the door, and they started out.

There was a distant humming which rose and fell, and a fine dust filled the air. Rainbow raised his voice slightly. “Last minute precautions. I have no idea what form their attack will take, but I do expect a direct assault on the light. We should be able to defend against any reasonable offensive move, unless they resort to using tactical atomic weapons.”

“Not here,” said Illya positively. “Radiation monitoring stations all over. It would attract a tremendous amount of attention.”

“Well, we’re reinforcing our structure and preparing to withstand a possible siege; we may be able to hold off the Wogs after all.”

“But they aren’t likely to stop. You may have to evacuate.”

“Leave my stronghold just as it is becoming livable? I may be of British stock, but I am not overly fond of castle life; the cold and damp are most unpleasant. Now it is nearly comfortable. And after all, a man’s castle is his home. Besides, I expect Thrush to slack off once you are safely away.”

“Possibly,” said Illya. “Possibly.”

Rainbow looked at his wrist watch. “Nine-thirty already! We must have a bite of supper. I have a great deal more to tell you, and the hours are passing far too quickly. Come - I will have trays sent up from the galley. Would you care for a turn around the rock before we get back to work?”

Napoleon shook his head. “There’ll be time enough for exercise in the morning.” He turned thoughtfully to Illya. “Under the circumstances,” he said, “I feel we should conclude our investigation of Mr. Rainbow, and concentrate upon the unexpected angles that have opened before us.”

The Russian nodded. “Succinctly put, Napoleon. I agree.”

Their host enjoyed this bit of byplay, and returned with them to his office. In the following hours, they gradually came into an open

exchange of data on Thrush, with the U.N.C.L.E. agents adding less-secret items to Rainbow's invaluable file. After midnight, Illya started taking written notes.

Thrush was not the sole topic of conversation. Rainbow would occasionally drift into a story from his military career, under Montgomery in the North African campaign, in Palestine after the War, in Korea and other combat zones later.

"Where in Korea?" Napoleon asked.

"Wonsan," Rainbow said. "Where were you?"

"Up and down the other coast, mostly. Mokpo to Seoul."

"It was a rotten little war, wasn't it?" There was silence on both sides for a moment, as Illya looked uncomfortably from one to the other. Solo returned first, and said, "Incidentally, your data on Thrush's political participation was most interesting."

"Indeed," said Illya. "I'm somewhat hurt to find them siding with the Russians so often."

"So is the Kremlin, comrade. That's probably why you're here."

"Gentlemen, before we part I would like to offer you an insight. Your organization is evenly matched with Thrush as things stand now. Thrush is small, mobile, flexible, decentralized. U.N.C.L.E. is large, powerful, comparatively sluggish and regulation restricted. For this reason Thrush has the initiative, striking wherever it will. If Thrush grew to develop sufficient strength to defeat you, it would also be that much slower and easier for you to hit. Conversely, you cannot speed up enough to follow them without changing their entire structure. You would also need to seize the initiative. Your position vis-a-vis Thrush is much the same as theirs with reference to me. You may take this for what it is worth - a thought late in the night, perhaps born of inspiration, perhaps of the bourbon."

He tipped the shared bottle over his glass, and leaned back into the chair. "The hour is late, and you must be leaving before dawn. Would you care for a short nap here? We will have a boat made ready for you, and you will leave about four o'clock."

"We hate to talk and run…" said Napoleon automatically.

“…but under the circumstances,” said Illya, and they let it go at that as Johnnie tapped a key on his intercom.

“Harry?” he said. “Do it.” He released the key and rose.

“I leave you here for your nap. The last of the bourbon was laced with another of Thrush’s chemical wonders - it will put you comfortably to sleep in the next minute or two, and you will wake up refreshed in two hours, with time for a quick breakfast. Good night. I’d like to get to my quarters before it takes effect.” And he closed the door.

Napoleon looked at Illya and said, “I hope he makes it.”

“He will. He held off drinking his until a minute or two after we’d finished ours. I remember thinking at the time…” His voice faded away, but Napoleon didn’t notice. He wouldn’t notice anything for two hours.

Shortly after four Napoleon stood in the gasoline-and-salt smelling area of the concealed clock. A large piece of camouflaged steel protected the anchorage, where several oddly assorted craft bobbed gently on the swells rolling in under the sea door, which was raised slightly to admit the breeze. He and Illya still held a last cup of steaming tea, and were bundled in most of their seafaring gear from the trip over. At their feet an impossibly tiny blue-gray inflated rubber liferaft rose and fell. Attached somehow behind it was a motor.

“Practically invisible to radar,” Johnnie was saying, “and quite invisible to an air-borne eye from any altitude over three hundred feet when the matching canopy is drawn over the passenger area.”

“Rather a distinctive color,” said Solo. “I’d hate to try it in the Fijis on a clear day.”

“Of course they are customized for the area in which they expect to see service. Another of Thrush’s little gifts.” He looked proudly around the cavern. “This,” he said, “I have done without help. My ideas, my plans, my money and organization. Thrush has never given me anything really valuable,” he continued, turning back to them. “Nothing but simple gadgets - like bright beads to a savage.” His face clouded over, and he clasped his hands behind his back.

“You should never have wasted your time and talents on me, but instead concentrate on this mob of foreigners who are trying to take over the world. This is what you’re supposed to be doing, isn’t it? It should certainly take precedence over chasing down a simple, honest, hard-working train robber.” The clouds cracked, and he smiled at his own final line. Then he shook hands with each of them. “Mr. Solo - Mr. Kuryakin. It has been a true pleasure meeting both of you, even under such trying circumstances. I hope we may work together sometime, against our mutual enemy.”

The two U.N.C.L.E. agents shot a glance at each other, and read agreement. Napoleon cleared his throat. “Ah, it’s not impossible,” he said slowly. “It might even be profitable.”

“Quite. We must keep in touch.”

“Quite,” echoed Illya.

A turtle-necked dock worker hurried up to Rainbow. “Ten after, chief. Radio room says there’s a call for you from somebody about an account coming due.”

“Thanks, Bill,” said Rainbow, and turned to Illya and Napoleon. “Time for you to leave. I’ll have the lights dimmed and the door lifted for you. The tradespeople can wait until I’ve seen you off.”

Quickly and cautiously they climbed over into the swaying little boat and started the engine. Rainbow said, “Compass?” and Illya held it up. “Remember the camouflage shroud,” added their host, “and *bon voyage*.”

He lifted an arm, and the lamps all over the cavern dimmed until the thin space of sky seemed light. Then the space widened as the door rose slowly, and Illya fed fuel to the engine. The outboard muttered behind them, and they hurried forward. The waves caught them just before they passed the wall of the cavern. The swell was low enough not to interfere with their propeller’s functioning, but they rose and fell a considerable amount as the tide swept past them, running into the mouth of the cavern. Napoleon looked down at the compass as the disguised door eased closed behind them and then looked up at the sky.

A few bright stars came through the thinning mists, and Solo said, “Well! I was turned around. Apparently this passage is on the side away from the mainland.”

“Did you expect it would be oriented for the view?” asked Illya.

Napoleon didn’t answer. In the gray light of pre-dawn he was occupied working them around the coastline of the island and into the open sea where the tide would carry them to land.

Shortly he took a compass bearing and a sighting, and shook his head. “We’ll have to crab,” he said. “Other wise we’ll end up right about the foot of those steps they were going to take me down.”

Realization came to both of them simultaneously. “So there was evidence pointing directly to Donzerly after all!” They congratulated each other on the belated ratiocination, and resolved to spring it on Escott at the earliest opportunity.

They looked back at the rocky spur of Donzerly almost two miles away as the light in the sky behind them grew. The dark lighthouse was still a shadow against the horizon, and the air was very still.

Illya heard it first, a low distant whistle that swiftly developed bass overtones and swelled into an approaching roar. They looked into the east, as the mists thinned and vanished about them, and saw a tiny dot low in the sky. Napoleon looked at Illya without a trace of e pression. “What time is it?” he asked, although he wore a watch on his wrist.

Illya also had a watch, but he didn’t look at it. His gaze was fixed on the small jet that bore towards them. “I would hazard a guess,” he said slowly, “that it is very near to four-thirty.”

Neither of them said any more, being occupied for the next fifteen seconds with breaking out and rigging the camouflaging tent which covered the entire liferaft.

Illya made a peephole and looked up as the plane passed high overhead. “It’s a *Mystere*. Probably a ranging run, or a threat of one. It’s about 8000 feet.”

“It’s past,” said Napoleon as the sound went over them. “Open the curtain. I want to…”

The curtains had already parted in Illya's grasp. Both of them had an unobstructed view as the twin-jet light bomber passed over Donzerly, and neither missed a detail an instant later when the entire rock was lost for an instant in a green flash. In the shocked fractions of a second that followed, stunned eyes registered photographically the smoke and blast that accompanied the flash. The lighthouse leaped skyward like a missile, but crumbled with terrifying slowness in midair as it rose. The rock itself seemed to disintegrate, and great pieces blew into the sea.

"Ulsenite," breathed Illya. "So Thrush got that after all!

"Get down and hang on!" snapped Napoleon. "That shock wave is going to hit us in -" The shock wave hit them before he finished, but it caught both of them prone with fists around anchored lanyards. Their ears were buffeted only a moment before the sea rose up under them and hurled them skyward like an express elevator, then fell from under them like an amusement park ride. The secondary and tertiary shocks followed, and the outboard engine screamed as the propeller clawed at the air a moment. They rode the waves for several seconds before daring to let go and look up.

The island was shattered. Ten or twenty feet of it stood up from the water like a broken tooth in an old skull. Through binoculars, Napoleon could barely make out any remains of the inhabited areas. Smoke rose slowly from the wreckage, and the sea lapped once again over the splintered rocks of Donzerly. Of the light, there was no sign.

From somewhere a seabird appeared, and circled the stump of rock, then dived at a stunned fish. In minutes thousands of seabirds clustered around the corpse of the island, like white vultures tearing at it. And their sound came across the slow-swelled sea, screeching and cawing over the choice morsels, fluttering, lit with the golden light of the newly-risen sun.

Chapter 16

How Napoleon and Illya Made Their Farewells, and The Rainbow Faded for a Time

SOMEWHERE IN THE winding maze of alleys that is Soho, beneath the night-shrouded streets, in a hidden room hung with silks and reeking with incense, two men sat as they had before.

“Your hospitality does not sway me,” said the man in the gray suit as he picked at a plate of chow mein with his fork. “You said you would give me an answer in two weeks, and tonight your time is up. What is your answer? Will you work for us?”

The old Chinese raised a thin hand. “Business over shared food is not proper. Let us speak instead of inconsequential things. Your latest operation, perhaps.” He returned to a bowl of something indescribable, and lifted out a piece of the contents with his chopsticks. He toyed with it a moment, enjoying his guest’s reaction like a Moslem tucking away a slab of roast beef before the eyes of a devout Hindu.

The Thrush watched him with care. “This is also business. The destruction of Johnnie Rainbow was necessary. It will also serve as an object lesson to those who oppose us. Do you choose now to join us - or to join him?”

“Please, Englishman. You return to business again. I wish only to speak idly of your successes. You are certain this is one of them?”

“Beyond a doubt. The light was utterly destroyed, and Rainbow with it - because he refused to cooperate.”

“Practical and efficient, if somewhat ruthless,” said the old Chinese. “How did you identify his body?” He took a sip of tea.

The man in the gray suit paused. “The entire island was destroyed. It would be impossible to find, let alone identify, any bodies after the blast.”

“I see.” The old Chinese nodded slightly, smiling to himself. “There is a saying, ancient among the warlords of my people. *An enemy should not be accounted defeated until his head has stood on a pole at your gate, and you have seen his wife weeping before it*.”

The Thrush almost registered an emotion. “Perhaps a valid axiom a thousand years ago, Excellency. But to day’s engines of destruction are far more capable than your ancestors could have imagined. Rainbow is dead - this is a certainty.”

“I have heard those words many times,” said the elder. “They have been pronounced over my own humble person more often than I can count, and yet I sit here talking with you.”

“Talking, but always avoiding the main question.” The man in the gray suit set his plate neatly on the edge of the desk. “I have finished eating, and we will now discuss business.”

“I fear we cannot continue this evening,” said the aged Oriental, as he opened an intricately-inlaid box at the side of his desk and brought out an ancient, carved pipe with a tiny bowl. “The stars are not favorable for giving a decision at this time.” He set something in the bowl of the pipe and picked up a candle. In seconds, the pungent odor of a Ming-Three began to seep around the incense in the room. He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, stroking the marmoset which rested silently on his brocaded shoulder.

Finally he spoke again, distantly. “I will contact you when I am ready. Until then it will do you no good to continue approaching me. The interview is at an end.”

The man in the gray suit leaned over the desk and sniffed. “You may force our patience too far. Rainbow’s fate could be yours as well.”

“I have much that you want, Thrush,” came the other’s voice, slowly and more faintly. “Destroy me, and you will lose all that I have to offer you. I know what you desire from me, and perhaps someday you may find something for which I would exchange it. I will know when you do.”

The man in the gray suit felt a touch on his arm, and turned to find two great, bare-chested, turbaned guards. He accompanied them

out, pausing a moment at the door to look back into the hazed interior of that enigmatic room, where an old Chinese with a brow like Shakespeare, a face like Satan, and eyes of the true tiger green, lay dreaming.

The following morning was Friday, and Napoleon and Illya hurried up the steep cobbled street of Baycombe towards Joey's cottage shortly before the clock would strike noon. They knocked, and she answered the door, tiny and quick, looking up at Napoleon under a sweep of coppery hair.

"Come on in," she said eagerly. "Dinner will be ready in fifteen minutes. Aunt Jane's just starting the rolls."

They had just time to recover from their trip and refresh themselves before dinner was laid. Conversation was minimal until the fish came, and then Illya said, "By the way, Napoleon, have you looked at that envelope yet?" He explained to the others, "It was handed us at our hotel just as we left in a hurry to catch the train,"

"In the rush I put it in my pocket," said Napoleon. "Probably just a note from the manager wondering if we want to keep the room since we use it so little." A clean knife slipped into one corner and the envelope surrendered its contents - a small sheet of paper, folded twice. Napoleon opened it up and looked at it.

After several seconds he passed it over to Illya, who studied it in equal silence, then looked at his partner and said, "Wordsworth." Napoleon took it back and extended it across the table to their companions.

It bore four typed lines, and across the bottom of the page a polychromatic smear of watercolor described an arc. The message read simply,

"The Rainbow comes and goes,
"And lovely is the rose
"Waters on a starry night
"Are beautiful and fair."

Aunt Jane read it twice slowly, and nodded. Illya said, "I believe the quotation is from *Intimations of Immortality*. Johnnie seems to

have escaped the destruction of his castle, at any rate."

"Yes, I believe he has," said the old lady. "But I was thinking there was a far, far truer line in the same stanza which he did not quote. Stanza two." Her darting eyes looked up like those of a little girl who is called upon to recite, but she seemed to be looking at something else - something which no one could see and which none but she and a few others could remember. And she said, "'*But yet I know, where'er I go, that there hath passed away a glory from the earth.*'"

Sunlight poured into the silent dining room through a bank of lace-curtained windows facing the calm sea. A gull wheeled and screamed somewhere.

"You don't mean Johnnie Rainbow," said Illya softly.

"No, I don't," said Aunt Jane. "He is one of the last."

Napoleon looked from one to the other of them, and gradually the meal resumed. "He'll start over," said the American agent. "And next time I'll bet he gets his elevator."

"Napoleon!" said Illya, scandalized. "Surely you aren't wishing success to him. After all, he is a criminal."

Solo quickly and emphatically denied any partisanship, and good cheer was restored. Dinner was leisurely paced, and small glasses of brandy were circulated in the neighborhood of one-thirty.

Just as the mantle-clock chimed, Napoleon's pocket communicator demanded his attention. He answered it, and Waverly's distinctive voice filled his ear.

"Mr. Solo? What are you up to now? It has taken an hour and a half to locate you. I will want a complete report on the Rainbow affair filed with the London office in twenty-four hours. Two reports have come in, both alarming, one immediate."

"We'll have the report in on time, sir," said Napoleon. "Itt's more than half finished. What are the problems?"

"Thrush has formed something called a 'Public Relations' division, and they are quite openly coming to the surface, proclaiming their connection with the parent organization. They simply appear at public functions - theatrical openings, political speeches, and the like - and do nothing. People are gradually becoming used to them. They

may help an old lady across a street, and leave her thinking kindly of Thrush. And they have no apparent legal connection with Thrush. All they do is wear the badges and talk to people. This display of confidence indicates some impending coup, I feel sure, probably centered in the southwestern United States."

"And what exactly is our assignment, sir?"

"Something else entirely. Mr. Kuryakin and you will separate for a while. There are signs of imminent war in the Middle East again, and our African continental office in Addis Ababa is quite overwhelmed. They're severely understaffed there, as you may recall, and with the constant problems in Nigeria, Congo, Sudan and Rhodesia they are unable to handle the sudden strain between Egypt and Israel. Mr. Solo, you will report to Tel Aviv; Mr. Kuryakin to Cairo. You will maintain constant contact once you are on station. The situation is extremely serious, and you may be able to alleviate it somewhat."

"How long is this assignment likely to last?" Napoleon asked, glancing at Joey.

Waverly harrumphed. "Due to the severity of the conflict," he said, "you will probably be asked to remain on station until the end of the war." He paused. "This, I believe, is called an incentive."

"Yes it is, sir," said Napoleon. "We'll be ready to leave at noon tomorrow."

"From London," said Waverly.

"Yes, sir," said Napoleon, and the contact was broken.

"Oh, dear," said Joey. "Leaving so soon?"

"I'm afraid so," said Illya.

"But we can still spare the afternoon," said Napoleon. "How would you like another last walk along the cliffs?"

And so they went. Aunt Jane remembered at the last minute that Mr. Escott had sent her three jars of honey to give to them - one was for Alexander Waverly. All three bore the stamp of three heraldic bugle-horns in their wax seals.

Napoleon brought his along, and the four of them broached it for their picnic supper as the sun declined towards the sea, away to their left. The afternoon breeze rippled the grasses and Napoleon was looking thought fully away somewhere. Then he turned to his partner.

“Illya,” he said, “didn’t Mr. Waverly say it took an hour and a half to contact us?”

“As I recall, he did. Why?”

“No particular reason. I was just thinking again about Baycombe as a spot to retire to.”

“Sometime in the indefinite future.”

Napoleon laughed. “You make it sound like a verb tense. No, I don’t think I could live in absolute solitude forever, but it would be nice for a year or two.”

“Or a week or two. That’s probably what got the former resident.”

“Of the Pillbox?”

“That’s what you were thinking about. Perfectly obvious.

“Elementary,” said Aunt Jane.

And they laughed and watched the sun drop into the sea one more time, and then made their way home in the light of the late-rising moon.